

A TIMES INVESTIGATION

As west Altadena burned, county fire trucks stayed elsewhere

West Altadena was burning, and no one was there to save it.

More than 40 Los Angeles County fire trucks surrounded the Palisades fire, where an inferno was entering its 17th hour. An additional 64 fire trucks fanned out across east Altadena and neighboring areas, battling a blaze that had sparked in Eaton Canyon nine hours earlier.

But in west Altadena — where thousands of structures would burn and all but one of the 19 deaths from the Eaton fire would occur — there was just one county fire truck as the flames spread at 3:08 a.m. on Jan. 8, according to automatic vehicle locator data obtained by The Times.

"We were abandoned," said Sofia Vidal, 57, one of more than a dozen residents interviewed by The Times who said they stayed dousing flames through the night with no firefighters in sight. "I never heard a siren."

Six months after the fire, the anger is palpable, with residents of the racially diverse unincor-

Vehicle locator data show most didn't come for hours. Angry residents wonder: Why?

By Rebecca Ellis and Sean Greene

porated area, long a refuge for Black families, convinced that they suffered from weaker fire protection than whiter, wealthier areas near the Palisades fire.

The sense of neglect is so intense that nearly 1 in 5 residents believes the county Fire Department let the town burn on purpose, according to an Altadena-based public interest research firm that interviewed more than 1,200 residents.

"Am I grateful for firemen? Not at all," said Vidal, who fled her home with her husband at 5:45 a.m. after burning squirrels began to fall from their palm tree. "Did they fail me miserably? Absolutely."

The L.A. County Fire Department's top brass has described the destruction in west Altadena as almost inevitable. The wind was too intense. The flames were too violent. The whole night, unprecedented.

But the vehicle locator data, which show that most county fire trucks didn't shift into west Altadena until long after [See Fire trucks, A4]

BONTA SEEKS TO CONTROL JUVENILE HALLS

California's attorney general moves to take over the troubled L.A. County facilities.

By JAMES QUEALLY AND REBECCA ELLIS

California Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta asked a judge Wednesday to place a court-appointed official in control of L.A. County's juvenile halls, after years of violence, riots, drug overdoses, allegations of abuse and the death of a teenager.

"We must act" to protect youths, Bonta said at a news conference Wednesday morning. "Receivership is the only path forward that ensures their rights, their safety and their futures are no longer subject to institutional failure."

Bonta said receivership means a court-appointed official would take over "management and operations of the juvenile halls" from the L.A. County Probation Department, including setting budgets and hiring and firing staff.

Bonta said he had given the county more than four years to fix the problems rampant in the halls. He called the county's failure "repeated, constant and chronic."

In a court filing made public Wednesday, Bonta said that L.A. County's repeated failure to adhere to a 2021 settlement has led ju- [See Juvenile, A14]

Plan for AI aims to cut red tape

By Queenie Wong

The Trump administration on Wednesday laid out a plan that aims to make it easier for companies to quickly develop and deploy artificial intelligence technology.

The initiative shows how Silicon Valley tech executives who backed Trump during the election are shaping federal policy that will affect their businesses as they compete globally to dominate the AI race.

"Artificial intelligence is a revolutionary technology with the potential to transform the global economy and alter the balance of power in the world," David Ackles, the White House's AI and crypto advisor, said in a statement. "To remain the leading economic and mili-



ROBERT GAUTHIER Los Angeles Times

DELIVERY robots are set to roll Wednesday at Kreation Kafe in Santa Monica.

More delivery bots on

Coco Robotics will add hundreds

By PIPER HEATH AND CAROLINE PETROW-COHEN

The robot invasion is coming to your neighbor-

country. Residents of one of the most red-taped delivery b

Setbacks in L.A. for Trump appointee

President's federal prosecutor struggles to secure indictments in Southland protests.

By JAMES QUEALLY AND BRITNY MEJIA

To bystanders, the federal courthouse in downtown Los Angeles sounded like a fortress during the recent protests.

The grand jury had refused to indict several accused of attacking law enforcement during the protests.

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LOS ANGELES TIMES
ISSN 0252-2525
Published by the Los Angeles Times Company
2025 Periodicals postage paid at Los Angeles, CA and at additional mailing offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Los Angeles Times, P.O. Box 990, Los Angeles, CA 90099.

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[Fire trucks, from A1] it was ravaged by fire, complicate the narrative. How much could have been saved, residents wonder, if firefighters focused on their neighborhood instead?

L.A. County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said the lack of fire trucks in west Altadena probably boiled down to “human error” by fire officials who decided where the trucks should move. Those officials — from the county as well as other agencies — were part of the “unified incident command” stationed for most of the fire at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

“Why didn’t we do a better job of dividing resources between east and west Altadena, right? That’s a fair question,” Marrone said. “What was going on? What were the people doing?”

“Did people who were working west not accurately communicate the dire circumstances that they were faced with?” said Marrone, who said he was at the Rose Bowl that night pleading with agencies across the region to send more trucks to the Eaton fire. “Or was there a lack of resources? Or were both sides of the fire equally challenging? ... I don’t know which one of those it is. It’s probably a little bit of all of that.”

Marrone said it’s possible that other fire agencies sent vehicles to focus on west Altadena, but his department didn’t track their locations.

The cascade of events leading to the tragedy in west Altadena began when the Los Angeles Fire Department failed to pre-deploy fire trucks to Pacific Palisades amid dire wind warnings, forcing the county to pitch in.

But west Altadena suffered from more than being the last place to catch fire in a day full of infernos. The vehicle locator data, according to some former L.A. city and county fire officials, point to a failure within the incident command coordinating the county’s response, led that night by Deputy Fire Chiefs Eleni Pappas and Albert Yanagisawa.

A growing fire is broken up into divisions, with supervisors — often battalion chiefs — communicating the fire conditions in their divisions up the chain to incident commanders, who use the information to decide where to position fire trucks.

Incident commanders, the former officials said, should pay attention to the “big picture” — not just where flames are raging, but where they’re headed. That means sending fire patrols — vehicles equipped with a pump, hose and water — to nearby neighborhoods to spot whether the fire has jumped with the wind. And it means quickly repositioning firefighters from the biggest eruption to small but growing ones, where they may have more impact.

Only one county fire patrol stopped west of Lake Avenue, the dividing line between east and west Altadena, during the first 12 hours of the Eaton fire, the vehicle locator data show, with assistant and battalion chiefs staying out of the heart of the neighborhood. Most county fire trucks didn’t move from the Eaton Canyon area, where the fire first erupted, until west Altadena was well on its way to burning to the ground.

Yanagisawa said incident commanders “did their very best” to battle a fire that dramatically outpaced their resources, with hurricane-force winds pushing the flames in different directions throughout the night.

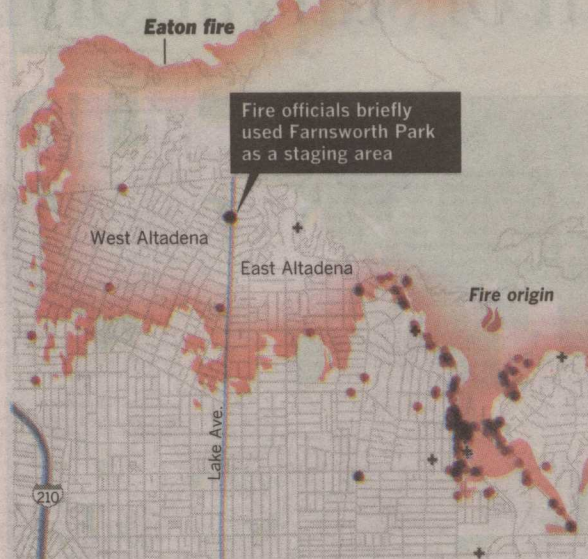
But a former Los Angeles Fire Department incident

As the evening wore on, L.A. County firefighters stayed east

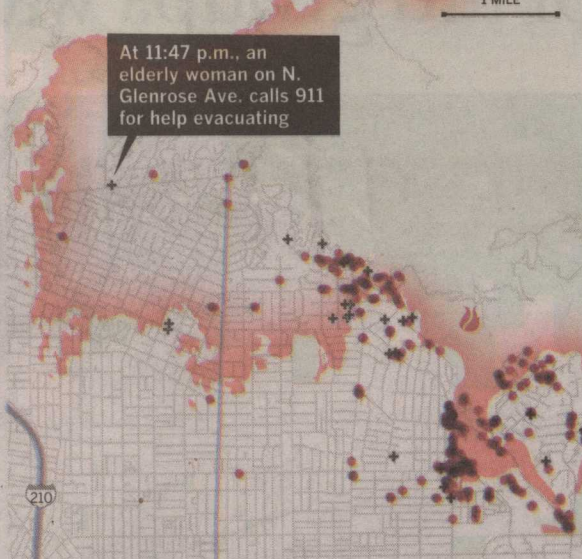
For many residents who called 911 from west Altadena, including some who died in the fire, help never arrived.

● Stopped vehicle + 911 call

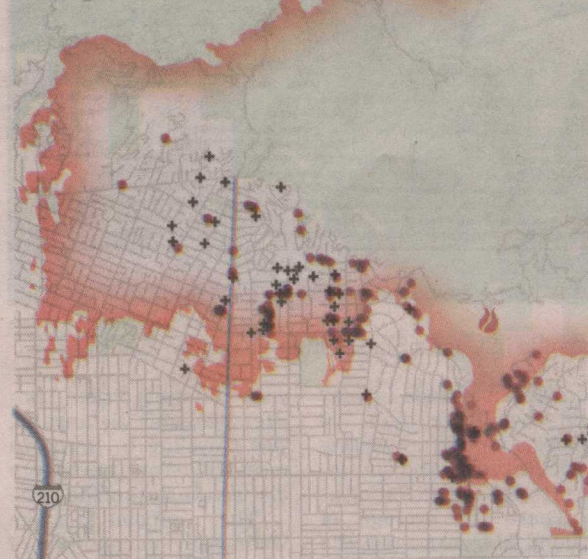
6 to 9 p.m.



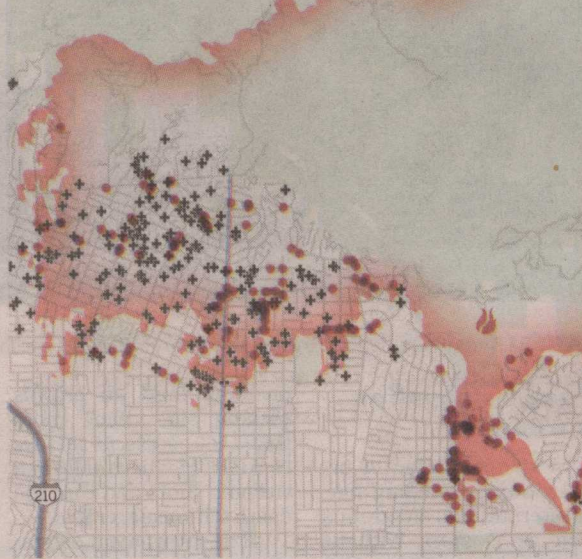
9 p.m. to midnight



Midnight to 3 a.m.



3 to 6 a.m.



Times analysis of L.A. County Fire Department automatic vehicle locator data

SEAN GREENE Los Angeles Times

West Altadenans ask: Where were fire crews?

Fire trucks from the roughly 20 other agencies responding to the Eaton fire, such as the U.S. Forest Service and the Pasadena Fire Department, were not captured in the data, nor were county trucks that didn’t have a vehicle locator system or whose system was not working. County officials said there could also be gaps in the data caused by disruptions in cell service. The Times has requested, but not received, vehicle locator data for some of the other agencies.

The data provide a possible explanation for one of county officials’ key failures. Residents west of Lake Avenue did not get an evacuation order until 3:25 a.m. Jan. 8 — more than four hours after flames were first reported in the area. East Altadenans got their first evacuation order at 6:40 p.m. Jan. 7.

Some former fire officials said the data suggest that firefighters may not have known of the embers flying into western neighborhoods. Ferocious winds grounded a county helicopter over Eaton Canyon almost immediately, leaving no bird’s-eye view. On the ground, county fire trucks were focused almost entirely east of Lake. No county fire vehicles responded to the 911 calls trickling in from west Altadena early in the night, according to the data, though it’s possible other agencies did.

The county has hired the consulting firm McChrystal



JULIANA YAMADA Los Angeles Times

TREVOR KELLEY says the fire was too intense for firefighters to help his mom.



tor Shaw, 66, died fighting the flames with a garden hose after a neighbor called 911.

On Tonia Avenue, Eriene Kelley, 83, died after calling 911 twice.

Her son, Trevor Kelley, tried to rescue her around 6 a.m., inching through oily black smoke too thick for his truck’s high beams to penetrate. He said he understood why no firefighters attempted it.

“The only reason why I went is because of my mom and pure adrenaline, but I can see that it would be impossible for them,” said Kelley, 59, who arrived to find his mother’s home burned to the ground. “They would actually be committing suicide.”

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The county started the day with firefighters to spare.

Marrone, responsible for fire protection across unincorporated parts of L.A. County as well as roughly 60 cities, extended the shift of firefighters about to go home the morning of Jan. 7, leaving him with 1,800 on hand. Later in the evening, he ordered 50 strike teams from the state, bringing an additional 250 vehicles into the fray.

When sparks ignited near Pacific Palisades around 10:30 a.m., county fire trucks raced to help the Los Angeles Fire Department, which had been caught flat-footed after staffing a fraction of its available vehicles.

In a day full of failures, the city’s staffing decision, experts said, was the original sin, creating a “domino effect” that hamstrung the county’s response to fires in its own territory.

“They pretty much used up their extra people to assist L.A. city,” said Rick Crawford, a former LAFD battalion chief who reviewed The Times’ vehicle locator analysis.

By 6:15 p.m., according to the data, the county had sent 47 fire trucks and more than 40 other vehicles to the Palisades fire. More than one-third were in Pacific Palisades — an area the city Fire Department is responsible for.

With the fire still raging across the Santa Monica Mountains, those trucks stayed put when flames erupted in Eaton Canyon at 6:18 p.m., about 40 miles away.

New county fire trucks flooded the canyon area to fight what would become the most hellish blaze of the day, with hurricane-force winds scattering embers in every direction. Trucks soon moved into the eastern reaches of Altadena and small pockets of Pasadena before fanning east into Kinmeloa Mesa, Sierra Madre and Pasadena’s Hasting Ranch neighborhood, the data show.

Firefighters said they met pure chaos on every corner — residents in wheelchairs desperate to escape nursing facilities, residents begging for their families to be saved. With lives still at risk, some county fire leaders said, it may not have made sense to divert to the west.

“We did not have enough people to shift in masses from one area of Altadena to another,” said Dave Gilotte, head of the county firefighters union. “The story very well could be, why did fire engines leave the area where we had people still trapped?”

A little after 10 p.m., some county fire trucks headed toward Sylmar after reports of a third fast-moving blaze came in from the San Fer-

[Fire trucks, from A1] U.S. Forest Service, the L.A. County Sheriff’s Department and several other nearby fire agencies. Marrone said that with his firefighters overwhelmed in east, other agencies came on scene later showing how they had helped in west Altadena.

“I don’t agree that L.A. County’s responsibility to make sure we go into west Altadena,” he said. “I’m going to allow L.A. County Fire or the men and women of my department to take this on the chin as, ‘Oh, Eaton fire failure, the Eaton fire deaths, were solely responsibility of Chief Marrone and his men and women.’ No, in my mind, that can’t be farther from the truth.”

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As firefighters battled three raging blazes across the county on Jan. 7, 911 dispatchers got the first call sign at 10:50 p.m. that flames were threatening homes west of Lake Avenue.

A 911 caller reported a flaming roof on East Cerveras Street. Two more calls from the street followed.

By 3:25 a.m., when the first evacuation order for the area went out, 911 dispatchers had received 17 reports of fire from homes west of Lake Avenue. No county trucks responded to the homes, according to data.

“Where these calls come in, they’ve got to assign somebody right away. Yeah, we got reports of fire jumping Lake Avenue. What’s going on? Any engines over there?” said a former L.A. County fire official who reviewed The Times’ analysis and requested anonymity to speak candidly about his former employer’s response. “We’re taught to not grow roots to speak, in any one area, you’ve got to move.”

Marrone said the dresses from the 911 calls should have all been relayed to the unified incident command. It’s possible, he said, that commanders sent trucks from other agencies to those calls, which wouldn’t have been reflected in the data.

Soon, west Altadena was a hellscape. Dispatchers were fielding a deluge of calls, many from residents trapped inside burning homes.

“I begged them to come imagine they have me on tape — I was crying when I said it. My life was going before my eyes,” said Dan MacPherson, 70, who called 911 around 5 a.m. after smoke grew so thick he couldn’t see his hand. “They said, ‘We’re busy.’”

He escaped as his neighbors’ home was engulfed in flames. Kim Winiecki, and Evelyn McClendon, didn’t make it out.

After the 3:25 a.m. evacuation order, some county

Under

[Trans care, from A1] ministration.

In the last week, University of Chicago Medicine and Children’s National D.C. announced they end or dramatically scale back services for transgender youth, following similar moves by Stanford Medicine, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and Children’s Hospital of Orange County.

“There’s a rapid collapse of the provision of this in blue states,” said AL

“faced with?” said Marrone, who said he was at the Rose Bowl that night pleading with agencies across the region to send more trucks to the Eaton fire. “Or was there a lack of resources? Or were both sides of the fire equally challenging? ... I don’t know which one of those it is. It’s probably a little bit of all of that.”

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But a former Los Angeles Fire Department incident commander said the data showed that too many firefighters were deployed like “moths to a candle,” directed to swarm the flames immediately in front of them.

“Nobody stood back and looked at the big picture,” said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss another agency’s operations. “It takes leadership and situational awareness to direct that as an incident commander and say, ‘Hey guys, I understand you guys are fighting fire there. I don’t need you there. Based on the map, weather, rate of fire spread and 911 calls we’re getting, I need you to defend homes and evacuation in this other community.’”

The automatic vehicle locator data, which The Times obtained through a public records request, track L.A. County Fire Department vehicles responding to the Palisades and Eaton fires on a minute-to-minute basis. The Times used the GPS coordinates to pinpoint every time a truck stopped.



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SEAN GREENE Los Angeles Times

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The county has hired the consulting firm McChrystal Group to investigate what went awry with the evacuation orders. The county Sheriff’s Department and the county Fire Department, which both had first responders in Altadena that night, have said they shared responsibility for ordering evacuations. A spokesperson for the Sheriff’s Department did not respond to an inquiry about where deputy vehicles were that night, and the agency has not fulfilled a request for vehicle locator data.

While homes near the foothills around Eaton Canyon were mostly unscathed by flames, most of west Altadena was destroyed. Thousands of structures were lost. Eighteen people died there — the vast majority on blocks where a county fire truck never stopped. One additional victim perished just east of Lake Avenue.

On West Terrace Street, despite three 911 calls, no aid came for Anthony Mitchell Sr., a 68-year-old amputee, and his son, who had cerebral palsy.

On Monterosa Drive, Vic-



JULIANA YAMADA Los Angeles Times

TREVOR KELLEY says the fire was too intense for firefighters to help his mom.



JULIANA YAMADA Los Angeles Times

SOFIA VIDAL holds a memorial tile of her turtle at the site of her former home.

‘Am I grateful for firemen? Not at all. Did they fail me miserably? Absolutely.’

— **SOFIA VIDAL**, west Altadena resident



CARLIN STIEHL Los Angeles Times

SYLVIE ANDREWS says firefighters didn’t come to save her home on Jan. 8.

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Marrone said he has not... conducted an analysis of fire... truck locations because the... state has hired the Fire Saf... ety Research Institute to do... an independent review of... the overall fire response.

He cautioned that the ve... hicle locator data show only... a partial picture, because... they don’t include dozens of... trucks from other agencies... The California Governor’s... Office of Emergency Serv... ices, for example, sent 68 fire... trucks during the first 12... hours of the Eaton fire but... did not have locator infor... mation available for them... The Pasadena Fire Depart... ment had 12 trucks at the... Eaton fire that night, in ad... dition to patrols, but... couldn’t say how much time... they spent in Altadena, ac... cording to Chief Chad Au... gustin.

The unified incident... command was led that night... by the county, along with the... [See Fire trucks, A5]

Und

[Trans care, ministration.

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A little after 10 p.m., county fire trucks headed toward Sylmar after the provision of this care came in from the San Fernando Valley.

"You can't just say not sending anybody," Hurst said — let it be said.

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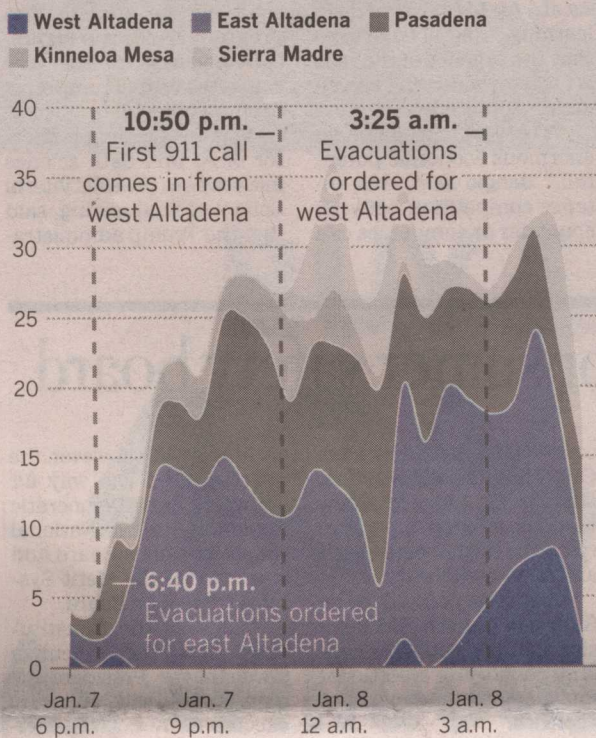
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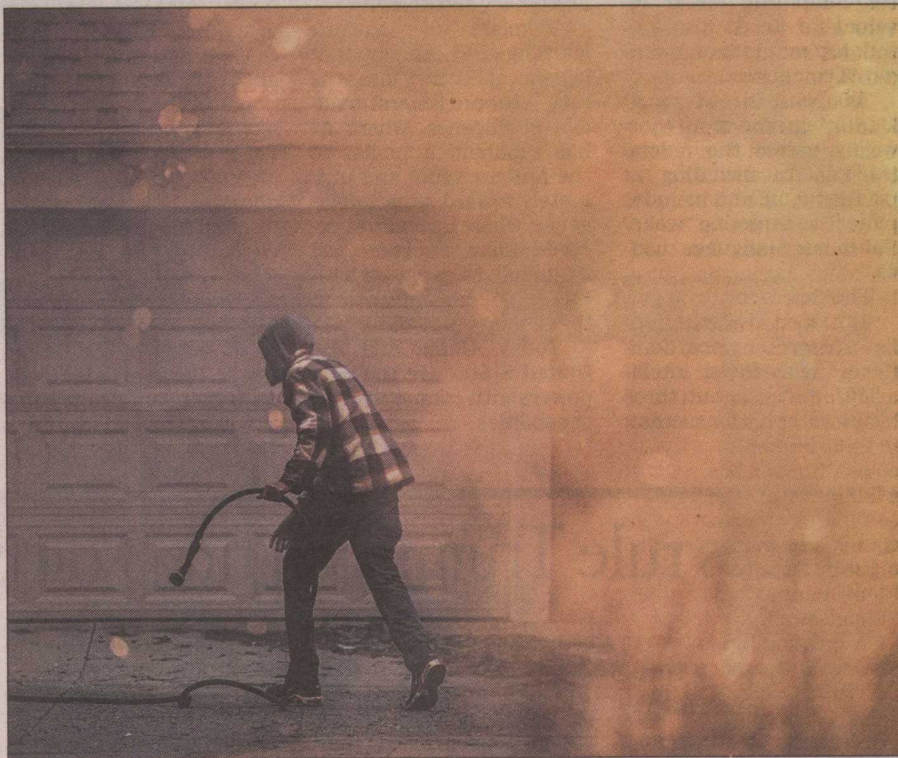
Times analysis of L.A. County Fire Dept. automatic vehicle locator data

SEAN GREENE Los Angeles Times

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Under pressure, Children's Hospital ends trans care

trans care, from A1]

In the last week, University of Chicago Medicine Children's National announced they will or dramatically scale services for trans youth, following similar moves by Stanford Medicine, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and Children's Hospital of Orange County.

There's a rapid collapse of the provision of this care in some states," said Alejandro Caraballo, a civil rights attorney and legal instructor at Harvard. "By end of 2025, care will effectively be cut."



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So far, the Trump administration has painted parents as victims of "radical gender ideology."

Some experts warned that as the government tightens the screws on doctors and hospitals, trans teens and their families are likely to seek hormones outside the medical system, including through gray market channels.

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therapy and surgical procedures.

But the list changes almost day to day.

"Even programs that may have been operating a month ago are not operating now," said Terra Russell-Slavin, chief impact officer at the Los Angeles LGBT Center. "There's a lot of concern about even being public about offering care because those agencies become targets."

With the medical care their children rely on under threat and few promised protections from the state, some families are unsure what the coming months will bring.

...extended the shift of firefighters about to go home the morning of Jan. 7, leaving him with 1,800 on hand. Later in the evening, he ordered 50 strike teams from the state, bringing an additional 250 vehicles into the fray.

When sparks ignited near Pacific Palisades around 10:30 a.m., county fire trucks raced to help the Los Angeles Fire Department, which had been caught flat-footed after staffing a fraction of its available vehicles.

In a day full of failures, the city's staffing decision, experts said, was the original sin, creating a "domino effect" that hamstrung the county's response to fires in its own territory.

"They pretty much used their extra people to assist L.A. city," said Rick Wford, a former LAFD battalion chief who reviewed the Times' vehicle locator analysis.

By 6:15 p.m., according to data, the county had 47 fire trucks and more than 40 other vehicles to the Palisades fire. More than a third were in Pacific Palisades — an area the city Department is responsible for.

With the fire still raging across the Santa Monica mountains, those trucks were put when flames spread in Eaton Canyon at 6 p.m., about 40 miles

from county fire trucks. The canyon area to what would become the most hellish blaze of the year with hurricane-force winds scattering embers in all directions. Trucks soon headed into the eastern reaches of Altadena and pockets of Pasadena fanned east into Kinneloa Mesa, Sierra Madre and Pasadena's Hasting neighborhood, the county said.

Firefighters said they were in chaos on every corner as residents in wheelchairs and the desperate to escape facilities, residents fled for their families to safety. With lives still at stake, county fire leaders said, it may not have been wise to divert to the

area. "We did not have enough trucks to shift in masses to the area of Altadena to fight the fire," said Dave Gillotte, a county firefighter. "The story very simply is, why did fire end up in the area where it did? People still

after 10 p.m., some trucks headed toward the fast-moving blaze from the San Fernando Valley.

"I can't just say, 'I'm going anywhere to the fire — let it burn,'" he said.

He said he has not seen an analysis of fire patterns because the Fire Safe Institute to do an independent review of the response.

He noted that the vehicle data show only a sliver of the picture, because it excludes dozens of other agencies. The state Governor's Emergency Service Unit, sent 68 fire trucks the first 12 hours of the Eaton fire but no locator information for them.

A Fire Department spokesman said trucks at the scene at night, in addition to patrols, but it took much time to get to Altadena, according to Chad Andrews, chief of the incident.

He said that night along with the trucks, A5]

homes west of Lake Avenue. A 911 caller reported a flaming roof on East Calaveras Street. Two more calls from the street followed.

By 3:25 a.m., when the first evacuation order for the area went out, 911 dispatchers had received 17 reports of fire from homes west of Lake Avenue. No county fire trucks responded to those homes, according to the data.

"Where these calls come in, they've got to assign somebody right away. 'Hey, yeah, we got reports of this fire jumping Lake Avenue. What's going on? Any engines over there?'" said a former L.A. County fire captain who reviewed the Times' analysis and requested anonymity to speak candidly about his former employer's response. "We're taught to not grow roots, so to speak, in any one area — you've got to move."

Marrone said the addresses from the 911 calls should have all been relayed to the unified incident command. It's possible, he said, that commanders sent fire trucks from other agencies to those calls, which wouldn't have been reflected in the data.

Soon, west Altadena was a hellscape. Dispatchers were fielding a deluge of 911 calls, many from residents trapped inside burning homes.

"I begged them to come. I imagine they have me on tape — I was crying when I said it. My life was going before my eyes," said Daniel MacPherson, 70, who called 911 around 5 a.m. after the smoke grew so thick he couldn't see his hand. "They said, 'We're busy.'"

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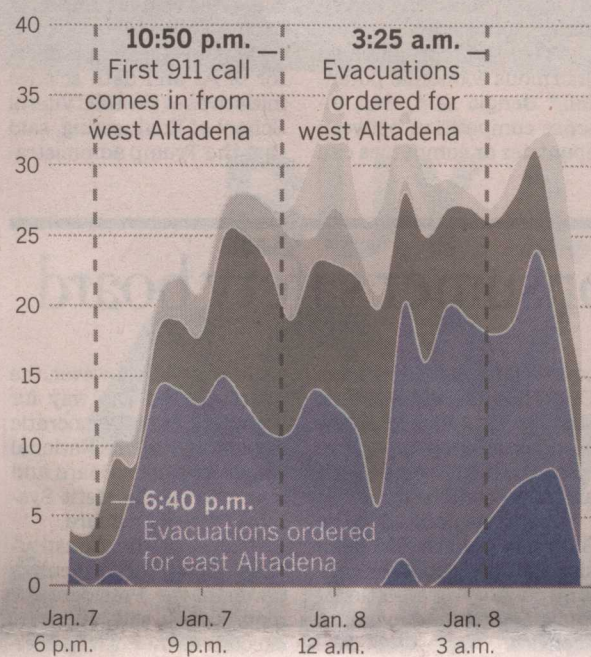
JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

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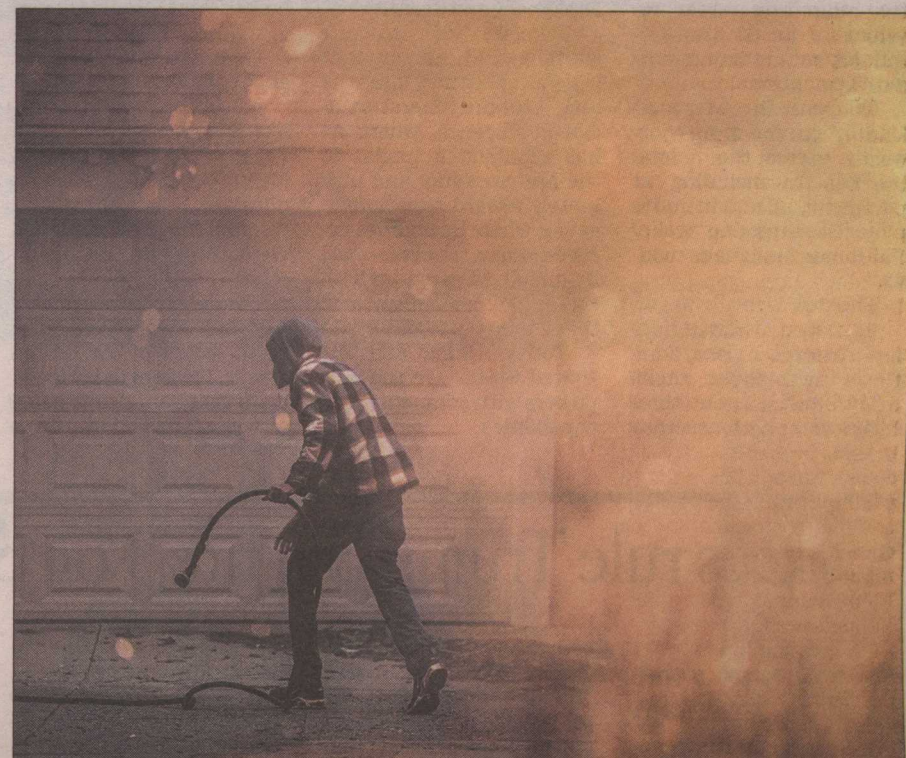
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Under pressure, Children's Hospital ends trans care

[Trans care, from A1] ministration.

In the last week, University of Chicago Medicine and Children's National in D.C. announced they will end or dramatically scale back services for trans youth, following similar moves by Stanford Medicine, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and Children's Hospital of Orange County.

"There's a rapid collapse of the provision of this care in blue states," said Alejandra Caraballo, a civil rights attorney and legal instructor at Harvard. "By end of 2025, most care will effectively be banned."

Some parents in L.A. say they fear the Department of Justice will use private medical data subpoenaed from California's largest pediatric safety-net hospital to take their children away from them.

"It's absolutely terrifying," said Maxine, the mother of a Children's Hospital patient, who declined to give her last name for fear of attacks on her son.

"I'm very afraid that the DOJ and this acting Attorney General are going to come after parents and use the female genital mutilation law ... to prosecute parents and separate me from my child," she said.

On July 9, Atty. Gen. Pam Bondi announced the Department of Justice was subpoenaing patient medical records from more than 20 doctors and clinics, the latest in a cavalcade of legal and technical maneuvers



DANIA MAXWELL Los Angeles Times

CHILDREN'S Hospital Los Angeles closed its pediatric gender clinic on Tuesday.

against providers who care for trans youth.

"Medical professionals and organizations that mutilated children in the service of a warped ideology will be held accountable by this Department of Justice," Bondi said in a news release announcing the move.

Children's would not say whether it had been subpoenaed or if it had turned over records responsive to the government's demand.

The Justice Department was already investigating pediatric specialists for a litany of alleged crimes, from deceptive trade practices to billing fraud. Federal health agencies have vowed to with-

hold funding from institutions that continue to provide affirming care.

"These threats are no longer theoretical," Children's Hospital executives wrote to staff in an internal email announcing the closure June 12. "[They are] threatening our ability to serve the hundreds of thousands of patients who depend on CHLA for lifesaving care."

Advocates say gender-affirming care is also lifesaving. They point to statistics — contested by the federal government and some experts — showing high rates of suicide among trans youth.

In June, the decision to shutter the clinic was widely condemned. Advocates said Children's Hospital L.A. had "thrown trans kids under the bus" in disregard of state law.

Few are saying that now. "You could see kids with leukemia being cut off their chemo therapy unless these hospitals stop providing care to trans people," Caraballo said. "If one of the biggest children's hospitals in the country couldn't shoulder that burden, I don't see many others being able to do so."

Others agreed. "No matter what California or any other state has

done to say, 'We want to protect these kids,' unless they can write checks that equal the amount of money that's being lost, [programs close]," said Dara E. Purvis, a law professor at Temple University.

So far, the Trump administration has painted parents as victims of "radical gender ideology."

Some experts warned that as the government tightens the screws on doctors and hospitals, trans teens and their families are likely to seek hormones outside the medical system, including through gray market channels.

"We've seen this with abortion," Caraballo said. "People are going to go about getting it whichever way they can."

There are fears that families could face prosecution for continuing to seek medications, similar to charges being filed against mothers who have secured abortion pills for their teenagers.

"We're working with Congress on existing criminal laws related to female genital mutilation to more robustly protect children," Justice Department Chief of Staff Chad Mizelle said during a Federal Trade Commission workshop titled "The Dangers of 'Gender-Affirming Care' for Minors."

"We are using all of the tools at the Department of Justice to address this issue," Mizelle said.

For now, dozens of hospitals across California still provide gender-affirming care, including hormone

therapy and surgical procedures.

But the list changes almost daily to day.

"Even programs that may have been operating a month ago are not operating now," said Terra Russell-Slavin, chief impact officer at the Los Angeles LGBT Center. "There's a lot of concern about even being public about offering care because those agencies become targets."

With the medical care their children rely on under threat and few promised protections from the state, some families are unsure what the coming months will bring.

For one Orange County father, who asked not to be named for fear of retaliation against his trans son, plans for future travel are suddenly in jeopardy.

He said only about half of his son's identity documents match his gender, and they've been warned not to try to change others.

"He won't be able to leave the country because he can't get a matching passport," the father said.

For Maxine, the L.A. mom, balancing the banal with the existential is a daily strain.

"My kid is just living their life. They want to go to concerts, they want to go shopping for back to school — they don't know any of this is happening," the mother said. "You have to experience this intense fear while maintaining a normal household for everybody else."

CITY & STATE



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

A VIEW of the neighborhood in Altadena where the Eaton fire victim was found, the latest since April.

Six months after fires, remains of 31st victim found in Altadena

Discovery raises combined death toll from Jan. 7 Palisades and Eaton blazes.

BY TERRY CASTLEMAN

A 19th victim of the Eaton fire has been found in Altadena, officials said, bringing the total death toll to 31 more than six months after unprecedented wildfires swept

through broad swaths of Los Angeles County.

The remains were found Monday in the 10 block of La Venezia Court and determined to be human, the medical examiner's office said in a statement Tuesday.

Like all but one of the victims of the Eaton fire, this person died west of North Lake Avenue, which served as a dividing line between those who received evacuation alerts before the flames arrived and those who did not.

The Palisades and Eaton fires were among the most deadly and destructive fires in California history. In addition to the dozens of lives lost, more than 16,000 structures burned, the majority of which were homes.

The victim has not been identified. Only one other victim, discovered in mid-January in Pacific Palisades, has yet to be identified.

Before Monday's announcement, the most recent discovery of remains was in April, representing

the 18th victim of the Eaton fire and the 30th overall.

Investigators rely on dental records, DNA, medical records and radiographs to identify remains, the statement said. They interview families of missing people to look for clues.

"Due to the complexity of these methods and the process, it can take considerable time to confirm a decedent's identity in these types of cases," the medical examiner's office said.

Matthew Perry doctor guilty of drug charges

Salvador Plasencia admits to supplying the actor, who died in 2023, with ketamine.

BY SANDRA McDONALD

One of the physicians who supplied ketamine to "Friends" star Matthew Perry appeared in a Los Angeles federal court Wednesday morning to plead guilty to multiple drug charges connected to the actor's death.

Dr. Salvador Plasencia, known to Perry as "Dr. P.," according to prosecutors, pleaded guilty to four felony counts of ketamine distribution. Plasencia, 43, supplied the drug to Perry through his live-in assistant, Kenneth Iwamasa, one of three defendants who pleaded guilty last year to their own connected charges.

"While Dr. Plasencia was not treating Mr. Perry at the time of his death, he hopes his case serves as a warning to other medical professionals and leads to stricter oversight and clear protocols for the rapidly growing at-home ketamine industry in order to prevent future tragedies like this one," his lawyer, Karen L. Goldstein, said in a statement.

Goldstein said her client was "profoundly remorseful" for his role in supplying ketamine to Perry, who was

vulnerable due to his history of addiction.

The doctor agreed, in addition to the plea deal signed last month, to give up his medical license within the next 30 to 45 days.

Plasencia faces up to 40 years in prison along with \$2 million in fines. His voice was quiet during the hearing Wednesday, with Judge Sherilyn Peace Garnett asking him to speak up as he relinquished his right to a jury trial.

Perry, 54, who was found in his Pacific Palisades home's hot tub in October 2023, died from the acute effects of ketamine. Authorities allege the actor's final dose, injected by Iwamasa, was sourced from the "Ketamine Queen" Jasveen Sangha, who pleaded not guilty and has a trial date set for Aug. 19.

Plasencia dabbed his face repeatedly with a cloth as prosecutors read out the charges, detailing how he sold the drug to Perry for thousands of dollars, sometimes administering it in the backs of cars in parking lots.

Plasencia will remain out on bail until his sentencing on Dec. 3 on request from his defense lawyer, who argued that he is one of the primary caretakers of a 2-year-old son.

His Calabasas urgent care clinic, which remains open, requires patients to sign waivers that explain the charges against him.

Erik Menendez seeking release from prison for serious medical condition, attorney says

BY HANNAH FRY AND RICHARD WINTON

Erik Menendez is seeking to be released from prison as he receives treatment for a serious medical condition ahead of his parole hearing next month, his attorney said this week.

Attorney Mark Geragos declined to share the specifics of the 54-year-old's condition in an interview with TMZ. But sources familiar

with Menendez's treatment told The Times he's suffering from severe kidney stones and complications arising from the condition, and needs extensive medical treatment.

Geragos did not immediately respond to a text message seeking comment from The Times on Tuesday.

Geragos told TMZ he would ask Gov. Gavin Newsom to release Menendez immediately ahead of the brothers' appearance be-

fore the parole board.

"It's a serious condition and he needs, I think, to be out so he can focus on the hearing," Geragos said, adding that he thinks early release would be "the appropriate thing to do."

Erik Menendez and his brother, Lyle, have spent more than 35 years in prison for killing their parents in 1989 in a case that over the last year has gained renewed public attention following the release of a Net-

flix series and various documentaries.

The brothers were given a chance at freedom in May when an L.A. County judge granted a request to resentence them.

Superior Court Judge Michael Jesic's decision to sentence the brothers to 50 years to life came after hours of testimony from family members who said the brothers had spent enough time behind bars for the brutal killings of their



WILLY SANJUAN Invision / Associated Press

MATTHEW PERRY died from the effects of ketamine. A supplier faces up to 40 years in prison.

parents. The brothers had been serving life terms without the possibility of parole.

If the parole board rec-

ommends freeing the brothers in August, the decision will be sent to Newsom for consideration.

Interim CEO picked for homeless agency

BY DOUG SMITH

An attorney who handles homelessness policy in the Los Angeles city attorney's office has been selected as the interim chief executive for the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority to guide the troubled agency through a year of downsizing.

An agenda item posted Tuesday would authorize Wendy Greuel, chair of the 10-member LAHSA commission, to negotiate a 12-month contract with Gita O'Neill, a career city attorney.

will be responsible for reshaping the joint city-county authority as it loses about 40% of its \$875-million budget and seeks to leave behind a tumultuous period in which it was harshly criticized in a series of audits for poor contract and data management.

A 2024 report by the Los Angeles County auditor-controller found that lax accounting procedures resulted in the failure to reclaim millions of dollars in cash advances to contractors and to pay other contractors on time, even when funds were available.

Those deficiencies were



train their systems on books and articles without fear they're violating copyright law or requiring they make deals with content providers.

The robots are designed to inspire affection. With their rounded edges and compact bodies, they navigate the neighborhood like proper pets, stopping for pe-

ROBERT GAUTHIER *Los Angeles Times*

have been good for business. Senior operations manager Jefferson Noe Ortiz said robot deliveries have in-

Bob Timmermann, a retired librarian, used a robot to send doughnuts to his former colleagues at the Los Angeles Central Library. The process was straightforward: Order through Uber Eats, watch the robot's prog-

Food delivery driver Julia

Rash says robots aren't necessarily displacing human drivers.

"It's neat, you know, it's cool. This is like 'The Jetsons,'" he said. "But, you know, that's a cartoon."

"America must once again be a country where innovators are rewarded with a green light, not strangled with red tape, so they can't move," Trump said.

The rapid pace of technological development has raised concerns about whether the government is doing enough to regulate tech companies and safeguard the public from AI's potential dangers. Some fact-checkers have noted that AI chatbots can spew

Data centers house computing equipment such as servers used to process the trove of information needed to train and maintain AI sys-

The White House's plan also tries to address one of the biggest concerns about the rapid deployment of AI: the potential that technology could replace humans in some jobs. The building of infrastructure to power AI systems, for example, will create high-paying jobs for Americans, the plan said.

The plan emphasized the importance of national security. It mentioned that the U.S. should export its "full A1

"President Trump's plan will accelerate infrastructure readiness so AI can be built and used here, and help students and workers with skills needed to win in an AI-powered global economy," he said on X.



Setbacks to federal push for protest indictments

[Essayli, from A1] according to the three officials.

Court records show the reason for Essayli's frustration.

Although his office filed felony cases against at least 38 people for alleged misconduct that took place either during last month's protests or near the sites of immigration raids, many have been dismissed or reduced to misdemeanor charges.

In total, he has secured only seven indictments, which usually need to be obtained no later than 21 days after the filing of a criminal complaint. Three other cases have been resolved via plea deal, records show.

The three officials who spoke to The Times on condition of anonymity said prosecutors have struggled to get several protest-related cases past grand juries, which need only to find probable cause that a crime has been committed in order to move forward. That is a much lower bar than the "beyond a reasonable doubt" standard required for a criminal conviction.

Five cases have been dismissed without prejudice — meaning they could be refiled — and records show nine have been filed as misdemeanors, which do not require a grand jury indictment to proceed. In some cases, prosecutors reduced charges against defendants to misdemeanors after repeatedly falling short at the grand jury stage, according to the three officials.

Essayli declined to be interviewed for this article. A statement provided by his office on Tuesday accused The Times of spreading "factual inaccuracies and anonymous gossip," but offered no specifics or further comment in response to questions.

"The U.S. Attorney's Office will continue working unapologetically to charge all those who assault our agents or impede our federal investigations," the statement said.

Legal experts said Essayli's low number of indictments raised concerns about the strength of the cases he is filing.

Carley Palmer, a former federal prosecutor in L.A. who is now a partner at Halpern May Ybarra Gelberg, said the grand jury's repeated rejection of cases was "a strong indication that the priorities of the



JASON ARMOND Los Angeles Times

A MAN faces members of the California National Guard during mass protests on June 8 in downtown L.A.

prosecutor's office are out of sync with the priorities of the general community."

Essayli has won indictments in some serious cases, including two where defendants are accused of throwing or planning to throw Molotov cocktails at L.A. law enforcement officers, and a case where defendants allegedly fired a paintball gun at federal police.

High-ranking Justice Department officials have repeatedly praised his work.

"My friend, U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli, is a champion for law and order who has done superlative work to prosecute rioters for attacking and obstructing law enforcement in Los Angeles," Bondi said in a statement to The Times.

But legal experts and some of Essayli's prosecutors say he's stretching legal limits to serve as President Trump's attack dog in L.A.

"It's just generally a culture of 'if Bill asks you to jump, you ask how high,'" said one prosecutor who feared retaliation. "Any case he wants to charge, find a way to make it a yes."

Questions about Essayli's effectiveness come at a crucial time for the former California Assembly member. Bondi appointed him in early April, giving him 120 days to serve as interim U.S. attorney until receiving Senate approval. If he is not con-

firmed by then, a panel of federal judges will have the opportunity to appoint him — or someone else — to the position.

Democratic Sens. Adam Schiff and Alex Padilla of California raised concerns about Essayli's leadership of the office in interviews with The Times, and a direct approval from the bench is no sure thing. This month, a federal judicial panel blocked Trump's choice for U.S. attorney in upstate New York after the time limit for Senate confirmation had expired.

On Tuesday, another judicial panel declined to appoint New Jersey's interim federal prosecutor, Alina Habba, one of Trump's former personal lawyers. Bondi, however, decried the judges for going "rogue," fired their choice for U.S. attorney and reappointed Habba. Legal experts say the move is unprecedented.

Meghan Blanco, a former federal prosecutor in L.A. who serves as defense counsel to one of the protesters who is facing charges, said the cases are faltering in part because of unreliable information provided by immigration agents claiming to be victims.

"Frankly, they're not deserving of prosecution," she said. "What is being alleged isn't a federal crime, or it simply did not happen."

Blanco represents Jose

Mojica, who was accused of pushing a federal officer in Paramount on June 7.

According to an investigation summary of the incident reviewed by The Times, a U.S. Border Patrol officer claimed a man was screaming in his face that he was going to "shoot him," then punched him. The officer said he and other agents started chasing the man, but were "stopped by two other males," later identified as Mojica and Bryan Ramos-Brito.

Blanco said she obtained social media videos showing no such chase took place and presented them at Mojica's first court appearance. The charges were dropped.

"The agent lied and said he was in hot pursuit of a person who punched him," Blanco said. "The entirety of the affidavit is false."

Felony charges against Ramos-Brito and two related defendants, Ashley and Joceline Rodriguez, were also dismissed, though prosecutors refiled misdemeanor cases against them.

Christian Camacho-Cerna, the man who allegedly punched an agent, has been indicted. He has pleaded not guilty, with trial set for next month.

Similar issues arose in the case of Andrea Velez, who was charged on June 25 with assaulting a federal officer. The criminal complaint alleged Velez, who is 4 feet 11

inches, stood in the path of an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer with her arms extended, striking his head and chest when they collided.

Diane Bass, Velez's attorney, said the incident occurred when masked, unidentified men in plain clothes pulled up to question a downtown L.A. street vendor.

Velez had just been dropped off for work when some of the masked men ran at her and one shoved her to the ground, Bass said. Velez, fearing she was being abducted, held up her work bag to shield herself.

Bass requested body-worn camera video and witness statements cited in the complaint. Soon after, she said, the prosecutor dismissed the case.

One of the three officials, who was not authorized to speak publicly, said concerns are growing among prosecutors about the accuracy of statements by federal immigration agents that serve as the basis for criminal charges.

"There are a lot of hot-headed [Customs and Border Protection] officers who are kind of arresting first and asking questions later. We're finding there's not probable cause to support it," said the prosecutor, who requested anonymity over concerns of repercussions.

One case under close

scrutiny is that of Adrian Martinez, a 20-year-old charged in a criminal complaint last month with conspiracy to impede a federal officer.

Martinez said he was on a break from his job at Walmart when he spotted immigration agents chasing down a custodial worker, and told them to leave the man alone.

Video shows Martinez being thrown to the ground and shoved into a truck, which he said took him to a parking structure.

Once there, Martinez said, he was told he'd been arrested for assaulting a federal officer by striking an agent in the face and breaking his glasses. Martinez, who weighs around 150 pounds, said the agents arresting him pointed to the colleague he was being accused of attacking, who looked "like a grizzly bear."

"I don't even remember you," Martinez recalled saying. "It just seemed like they were trying to get me to say like, 'yes, you assaulted him,' but I knew I didn't."

The next day, Essayli posted a photo on X of Martinez, still in his blue Walmart vest. Martinez, he wrote, had been arrested "for an allegation of punching a border patrol agent in the face."

The criminal complaint makes no reference to a punch, and video taken at the scene does not clearly show Martinez striking anyone.

Federal prosecutors instead charged Martinez with conspiracy to impede a federal officer, alleging he blocked federal law enforcement vehicles with his car and then later a trash can.

Ciaran McEvoy, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office, previously told The Times that complaints do not always include "the full scope of a defendant's conduct, or the evidence that will be presented at trial."

A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said the agency could not comment on cases under active litigation.

"Our officers are facing a surge in assaults and attacks against them as they put their lives on the line to enforce our nation's laws," the Homeland Security statement said.

Times staff writer Kevin Rector contributed to this report.

State attorney general seeks to take over L.A. County juvenile halls

[Juvenile, from A1] juveniles to suffer "severe harms during the life of the Judgment — including overdoses on narcotics allowed to enter the facility, youth-on-youth violence facilitated by staff, and significant unmet medical need."

Bonta said he also will ask for a court order requiring the county to establish a compensation fund for young people harmed in county custody, which they could use to pay for medical treatment and educational services, among other benefits. He emphasized the county will also be paying for all the changes made by a monitor.

Late Wednesday, the Probation Department issued a statement contending, without evidence, that Bonta included "misleading information" in his court filing.

"Our hope is that a receivership structure, should it be approved, be used as a collaborative tool to help remove obstacles — not as an



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

LOS PADRINOS Juvenile Hall in Downey has seen chaos, with a riot and escape attempt in its first month.

standards to house youths under California law. That same year, 18-year-old Bryan Diaz died of a drug overdose at the Secure Youth Treatment Facility. Reports of

ment for years and has openly shunned state oversight, like when it ignored an order to close Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall in Downey late last year.

County level, and still, we are failing these young people," Hahn said.

Supervisor Lindsey Horvath, whose district includes Barry J. Nidorf Hall in Syl-

the halls. Bonta first suggested he might seek receivership in May, in response to questions for a Times investigation.

The unions representing

the life of the settlement, records show. The L.A. County inspector general's office has published six reports showing the department has failed to meet the terms of the state oversight agreement. Oversight officials have caught several probation officers lying about violent incidents in the halls after reviewing videos that contradicted written reports.

After the state shut down the county's other two major detention centers, Los Padrinos was reopened but quickly became a haven for chaos. In its first month of operation, there was a riot and an escape attempt and someone brought a gun inside the youth hall.

Eduardo Mundo, head of the county's probation oversight commission, said he couldn't tell whether the receivership would be a net positive for the department.

It was unclear, he said, how a receiver could solve the chaotic, inoperable...

RENDERING

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By JAMES QU

A man susp...
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ESSENTIAL

Left

Before

lenges, who would want to buy a movie studio now?

Many people, it turns out. Earlier this month, the entertainment industry was abuzz after reports that film and TV production company Legendary Entertain-

"Joker" and Ocean's Eleven" producer and financier Village Roadshow Entertainment for \$417.5 million after an auction process that was part of the West Hollywood company's Chapter 11 [See Studios, A12]

DRUZE factions, top, move displaced families to mountains. Center, Druze fighter at the National Hospital. Above, one of the many injured receives treatment.

pointed city, largely spared the ravages of Syria's 14-year civil war, into a slaughterhouse.

"There isn't a single home in the whole province that isn't grieving someone," said Randa Mihrez, one of [See Syria, A4]

ICE raids cloud picture for legal pot

Aftermath is devastating for one of state's largest cannabis operators



PAUL KURODA For The Times

A HOTHOUSE glows at a cannabis farm on California's Central Coast. Recent ICE raids at Glass House Brands have left the industry shaken.

BY JESSICA GARRISON
AND MELISSA GOMEZ

Ever since federal immigration agents raided one of the largest licensed cannabis operators in the state this month, the phones of cannabis industry insiders have been blazing with messages of fear, sadness and confusion.

"It sent shock waves through the community," said Hirsh Jain, the founder of Ananda Strategy, which advises cannabis businesses. "Everyone is on text threads."

Glass House Brands, whose cannabis operations have helped make Santa Barbara and Ventura counties the new cannabis capitals of California, has long been among the most prominent companies in the state's wild frontier of legal cannabis. Some call it the "Walmart of Weed" for its streamlined, low-cost production methods, its gargantuan market share and its phalanx of [See Cannabis, A8]

Months after Eaton fire, remains found

Officials confirm what is hoped to be the final death from the January conflagration.

BY GRACE TOOHEY

While Katherine Alcantara was evacuating from her smoke-filled west Altadena home during January's firestorm, she remembered seeing her longtime neighbor returning home across the street.

In the chaos, she assumed he had come back to rescue his pets and grab some important belongings before heading to safety.

She never imagined he wouldn't make it out.

"I remember hearing the dogs barking hysterically. ... Did he try to save the house? Did he pass out?" Alcantara, 45, recalled this week in an interview with The Times. "I can't believe they found the body now, like six months later."

Officials this week confirmed the presence of human remains in the only un-

cleared lot on La Venezia Court, a small residential block where neighbors said 74-year-old Juan Francisco Espinoza had lived alone with his dogs. The confirmation of another fatality brings the Eaton fire death toll to 19 and the overall death toll from the Jan. 7 firestorm, including the Palisades fire, to 31. All but one of the Eaton fire deaths occurred in west Altadena, where evacuation orders for residents came hours after the fire had already arrived, according to a Times investigation.

The neighborhood where Espinoza lived received the most delayed evacuation orders, with electronic alerts going out to his section of west Altadena just before 6 a.m. on Jan. 8 — almost 12 hours after the fire started. About a mile to the east, where the community is generally more affluent and less diverse, electronic evacuation orders were sent out about an hour after the fire broke out just after 6 p.m. Jan. 7, according to records of archived alerts.

[See Victim, A9]

Billions in withheld school grants set for release

BY HOWARD BLUME

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is releasing billions of dollars in grants to schools for adult literacy, English language instruction and other pro-

grams, including at least \$800 million for California.

On July 1, the administration withheld the education funds — already appropriated by Congress — as it conducted a "programmatic review" about how the money was being spent and

whether it complied with President Trump's priorities, policies and executive orders. The actions disrupted school districts throughout the country — including in Republican-led states — that were depending on the release of the

funds.

The funding freeze had been challenged by at least two major lawsuits, including one from California and other states in which Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta played a key role in filing.

[See Education fund, A14]

What's next for Paramount deal?

Questions of creative freedom, TV's future and other issues loom as Skydance merger nears finish line. **BUSINESS, A10**

Wrong turn spurs deportation case

Federal government signals no leniency for man living in the U.S. under Obama-era program. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

UCLA's new QB plays defense

Nico Iamaleava fields questions about transfer from Tennessee, saying he wanted to be near family. **SPORTS, B12**

Weather
Turning sunny.
L.A. Basin: 78/60. **B8**



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

ROSALIA ESPINO, who lost her Altadena home in the Eaton fire, helped create a fire victims memorial.

Community' Six months after Eaton fire, 19th victim is found

[Victim, from A1]

in English and Alcantara said she got warning anyone the county's electronic evacuation order on her phone working in the canna- after waking up to thick smoke and fire alarms going operations." The off.

oted that "because "We got the warning s remains crimi- when the roof is literally on under federal law fire," Alcantara recalled. "I t contact with federal could barely breathe, my could have serious eyes were burning. ... Why ences even for peo- did they evacuate so late?"

legal status." She worries that, be- EC Legal Center, a cause of the late alerts, Es- a Valley-based pinoza didn't have enough at supports immi- time to get out.

and farmworkers, is- "A lot of people died be- similar message, cause of the alerts," Alcan- warned noncitizens tara said. "It just feels like ... rking in the mari- they didn't really care about industry and avoid us.

g any marijuana "I just feel bad," she said. ssession — even if it "That wasn't the way to go."

California — with Over the last month, gents, because it workers spent several days t their status. searching Espinoza's lot, half the farmwork- eventually gathering enough fornia are undocu- evidence of "essentially cre- according to UC mated remains" to confirm searchers. Canna- that somebody died there, ry experts said it is said Emily Tauscher, the as- sistant chief of investiga-

to know whether tions and transport for the Glass House will Los Angeles County medical larger cannabis ex- examiner. It could now take — or whether months to positively identify used cannabis op- the body, she said.

st guest would be "These are challenging situations. It's labor inten- sive," Tauscher said. "We're going to be hap- lot more cultiva- s," said Meilad of executive of the consulting group

the undocu- aminer's office is called to a workers at Glass scene after law enforcement ne day of the raids determines there is a "com- peling concern" about a 56, who had been death at a specific location, kicking off a long, compli- cated search, often involving

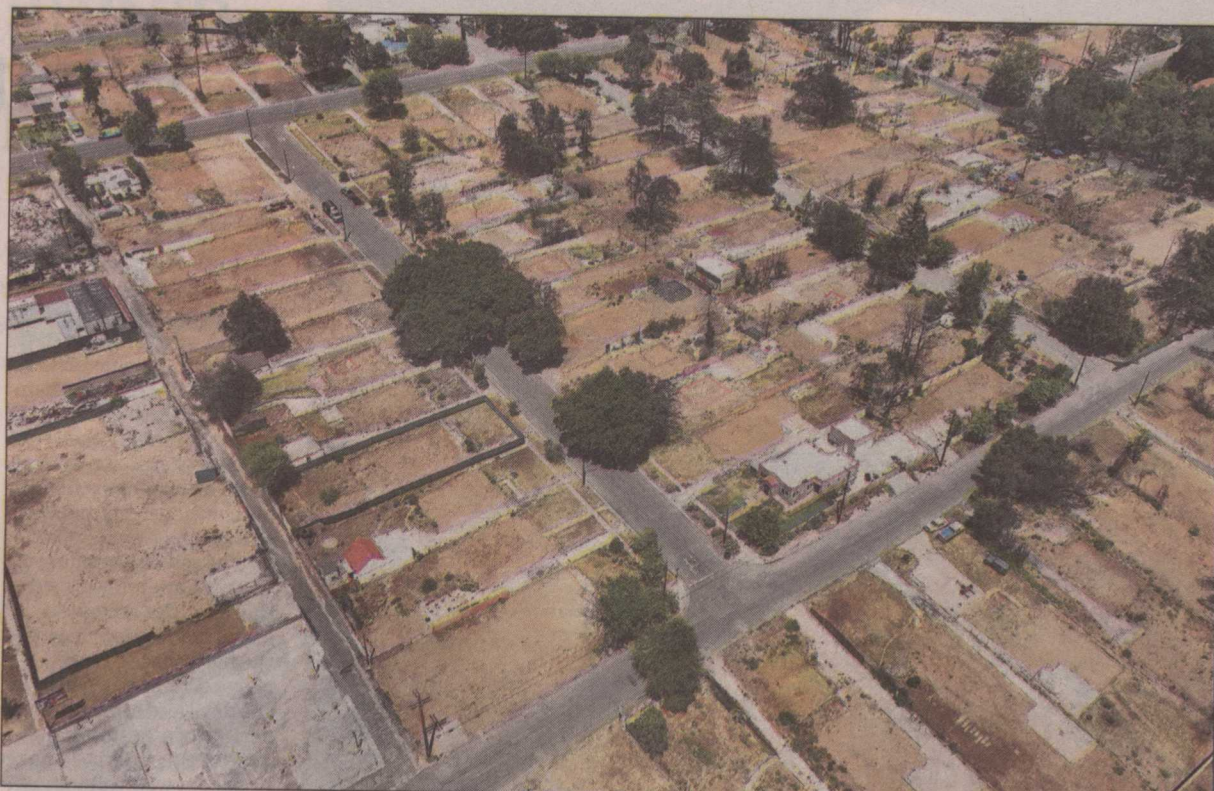
major debris removal and cadaver dogs who detect hu- man remains, she said. In this case, Tauscher said the medical examiner began working with law en- forcement in June after a neighbor filed a missing per- son report for Espinoza in May. It appears he had no living family members, ac- cording to neighbors and a search of public records.

Tauscher said circum- stances around a death, such as having no immedi- ate family or next of kin, can further complicate the al- ready difficult search and identification process, which requires slow, meticu- lous work. Although victims in other major, deadly fires were recovered within a few weeks, Tauscher said she's not surprised there have been a few late discoveries in the Eaton fire. In April, her team also confirmed human remains at a different loca- tion in Altadena.

"This is not unexpected for when you have some- thing to this scale," Tauscher said. "It will take time to be able to get through."

With that said, there is hope the remains found this week will be the last.

Los Angeles police said there were no missing per- sons reports outstanding



AN AERIAL VIEW this week shows mostly cleared properties that were lost to the Eaton fire in Altadena.

Photographs by ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times



A FENCE surrounds the property of an Eaton fire-destroyed home in Altadena.

from the Palisades fire, and Espinoza is the last person considered missing from the Eaton fire, said Ethan Marquez, the acting captain of the Altadena station for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

"They're coming into the final stages of abating prop- erties," he said. "We're al- most cleared of everything."

The remains found on Es- pinoza's property are the last unidentified remains from the January firestorm, after officials last week an- nounced they'd identified a Palisades fire victim as Mar-ilyn Hamilton, 71. Her re- mains were found in Janu- ary, but Tauscher said the medical examiner's office had to make its conclusion based on circumstantial evi- dence because the condition of the remains complicated the identification.

Some neighbors, howev- er, questioned why it took so long to find the remains from the rubble of Espinoza's home.

Chiquita Waters, who

lived next door to Espinoza, said she waited for weeks for officials to search his prop- erty or for his name to turn up on the medical exami- ner's site. No one from their close-knit block had seen him since the fire, and his lot remained untouched, with no visits by the Federal Emergency Management Agency or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, she said.

About three months after the fire, she said she tried to find family members or em- ployers of Espinoza on her own, but had no luck.

She finally tried to report him missing to the Sheriff's Department in mid-April, she said, but the depart- ment initially didn't com- plete the report.

"It felt like nobody was hearing me or taking me se- rious," Waters said. But in May, she said she had better luck after meeting Marquez at an event. She told him about her missing neighbor.

"Somebody needed to re- port him," said Waters, 74. "He was a human being."

In a statement, officials with the sheriff's Altadena station said the department began looking into the pos- sibility of a missing person when it was first reported, doing a property check and using other department re- sources. Efforts were made to complete the report, but there was an issue with the contact information of the person who filed it, the state- ment said; once that person contacted the station again, the report was completed.

The department empha- sized that deputies "take all reports of missing persons seriously and are committed to conducting thorough in- vestigations."

On May 21, the Sheriff's Department shared a bulletin about Espinoza, de- tailing that he was last seen on Jan. 7 in the fire zone wearing blue overalls.

The statement from the Altadena sheriff's station was also clear that a missing person report isn't required to jump-start an on-the- ground search.

"Search and rescue per- sonnel, along with cadaver K9's, have previously con- ducted grid searches of burn areas for possible human re- mains," the sheriff's station statement said.

In this case, Tauscher said the medical examiner's Special Operations Re- sponse Team first got to the property in June, where they found significant debris, in- cluding a collapsed roof, that had to be removed be- fore they could begin sifting through the rubble. After that, her team could begin looking for remains, which often required them to sift through rubble on their hands and knees for hours.

"We are very methodical when it comes to trying to do as comprehensive a search as possible," Tauscher said. "We're talking fragments of bone."

She said the process is often quicker in cases with local family who can advo- cate for their loved ones or provide detailed informa- tion that can aid in the search. It's much more chal- lenging when they are rely- ing on limited missing per- sons reports requiring wide- spread property searches.

When and if remains are found, Tauscher said that kicks off the second stage in the challenging process: "identifying these charred, highly fragmented re- mains."

There are certain factors can speed this along, such as finding medical equipment that can be matched with medical records or enough teeth that can be compared to dental records, she said. They have also been able to use rapid DNA testing, but that requires finding re- mains intact enough to do the tests and potential fam- ily members with which to

compare the findings, she said.

"It all depends on the quality of the remains," Tauscher said.

Neighbors said they knew little about Espinoza, explaining that he mostly kept to himself during his 20 years living on the block. He religiously went to work ev- ery morning dressed in coveralls, Alcantara said, though she only ever knew him to work as a notary. His longtime partner died a few years ago, she said, and oth- erwise, he didn't have any close relatives. He was from El Salvador, she said.

"He'd just go to work early, come back late, just wave hi and bye, that's it," Al- cantara said.

Leticia Serafin, who lives about block away, said Es- pinoza moved in a few years after she did almost 25 years ago.

"He just kept to himself," Serafin, 51, said. "It's defi- nitely really hard to hear [about his death], because you know what? We had no warnings to evacuate what- soever."

She's still frustrated that she saw no officials giving warnings or helping people evacuate, even as smoke and flames filled their neighbor- hood.

"They all have sirens, they all have speakers," she said. "We never heard any- thing."

Andrew Becerra, another neighbor, said he stayed be- hind on their block, even af- ter the delayed evacuation order went out. He said he ran around trying to save homes — and was successful — until there was no more water in the lines.

"It bothers me because I think I could have saved him," Becerra, 38, said. He said he had no idea that Es- pinoza was still home as the fire spread.

"I didn't want to turn my back onto nothing," Becerra said, shaking his head. "Maybe if I acted sooner, maybe I could have gave him a chance."

Like many other west Al- tadena residents have noted, Becerra said he didn't see any firefighters in the area as he tried to save homes. A Times investiga- tion showed fire trucks were largely not in west Altadena during the first 12 hours of the fire.

But just learning Es- pinoza's likely fate has brought solace for some, who were burdened with the mystery of what happened to their quiet, quirky neigh- bor.

"In a way, I do feel a sense of, well now we know he's gone," Waters said, mention- ing that she now hopes his lot will be cleared. "God rest his soul."

Times staff writer Richard Winton contributed to this report.

Disgraced former N.Y. congressman reports to prison

BY PHILIP MARCELO

NEW YORK — Dis- graced former U.S. Rep. George Santos reported to a federal prison in New Jersey on Friday to begin serving a seven-year sentence for the fraud charges that got him ousted from Congress.

The federal Bureau of

been! Was it messy? Always. Glamorous? Occasionally. Honest? I tried ... most days."

Santos will serve his time in a minimum-security camp at the all-male facility, which also includes a larger medium-security prison, ac- cording to the Bureau of Prisons.

In a Thursday interview,



JUSTICE OFFICIAL TO MEET EPSTEIN'S TOP AIDE

A federal attorney says he plans to ask Ghislaine Maxwell, 'What do you know?'

By MICHAEL WILNER

WASHINGTON — Up-roar over the Trump administration's handling of files from the Jeffrey Epstein investigation continues to grip Washington, prompting the Justice Department on Tuesday to schedule an unusual meeting with Epstein's top confidant, Ghislaine Maxwell, and the House Oversight Committee to move to subpoena her testimony amid bipartisan calls for transparency in the case.

The renewed focus on Maxwell comes amid persistent questions over President Trump's years-long friendship with Epstein, the late and disgraced financier whose sprawling sex-trafficking ring victimized more than 200 women and girls.

Maxwell is serving a 20-year sentence in federal prison for her role in perpetuating one of the most expansive sex-trafficking rings in modern U.S. history.

It is the first time the Justice Department has approached Maxwell's counsel for a meeting, according to the deputy attorney general, Todd Blanche, who wrote in a statement that he would take the meeting himself "to ask: What do you know?"

"No one is above the law — and no lead is off-limits," said Blanche, formerly one of Trump's personal attorneys.

And yet, Republicans and Democrats alike are ex-

[See Epstein, A7]



HOUSE Speaker Mike Johnson moved to send lawmakers home early to prevent a vote on Jeffrey Epstein files.

ALEX WONG/Getty Images

Eaton blaze could use up state's \$21-billion wildfire fund

Damage claims from the Eaton wildfire in Altadena could wipe out the \$21-billion fund California created to shield utilities and their customers from the cost of wildfires sparked by electric lines, according to newly released state documents.

Investigators are seeking to determine whether Southern California Edison's equipment sparked the Jan. 7 inferno, which killed 18 people and destroyed 9,000 homes. If Edison is found responsible, "the resulting claims may be substantial enough to fully exhaust the Fund," state officials who administer the wildfire fund wrote in a draft annual report to the Legislature.

The seven-member state Catastrophe Response Council, which oversees the fund, is scheduled to meet Thursday to discuss how potential damage claims from the Eaton

New data show that money to protect utilities and their clients may be drained by claims from Jan. 7 inferno

By Melody Petersen

fire could affect it.

Concerns are already emerging that, should Edison be found liable, it would have little incentive to keep damage claims from becoming excessive since the utility itself would be spared from covering most of the costs.

"Are we impressing on the utilities that they need to settle claims with diligence?" wrote one of the council members, according to meeting materials released ahead of Thursday's meeting. "Since the claims they settle are just passed on to us, they don't have much incentive to keep claims low."

Asked for comment on that statement, Edison spokeswoman Kathleen Dunleavy said that officials "need to be wise and cautious about how this money is spent."

"We agree" [See Claims, A14]

LAUSD testing scores reach new high

Pupils make gains in English and math for a second year, topping pre-pandemic results.

By HOWARD BLUME

After years of struggling to recover from deep pandemic setbacks, Los Angeles Unified students have achieved a "new high water mark," with math and English scores rising across all tested grades for the second straight year, surpassing results from before the 2020 campus closures, Supt. Alberto Carvalho said.

Two years of incremental gains at every tested grade level is generally considered solid evidence that instruction is moving in the right direction, said Carvalho, along with education experts.

"The coolest thing is that the district, despite all that this community went through, has now reached the highest-ever performance at all levels in English language arts and math," Carvalho said in an interview with The Times. He formally announced the results Tuesday during his annual [See Education, A8]

Encino suspect allegedly called 911

Police still didn't find bodies of 'Idol' exec and her husband for four days, D.A. says.

By RICHARD WINTON,
LIBOR JANY
AND HANNAH FRY

The man accused of killing "American Idol" music supervisor Robin Kaye and her rock musician husband, Tom DeLuca, in their home in Encino allegedly called 911 after the crime, the county's top prosecutor said, yet it still took four more days to discover their bodies.

Los Angeles County Dist. Atty. Nathan Hochman said the couple were shot with their own gun. The new details in the slayings of Kaye and DeLuca were revealed during a Monday town hall meeting in Encino, where hundreds of residents gathered to express frustration about a string of recent [See Slayings, A14]

'South Park' team inks lucrative deals

Paramount has landed streaming rights to the series for \$300 million a year for five years.

By MEG JAMES

"South Park" creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone have scored two blockbuster deals that will pay their production company more than \$1.25 billion — ranking their pacts among the richest in television history.

Paramount Global secured the show's exclusive global streaming rights for \$300 million a year for five years, bringing Kenny, Kyle, Stan and Cartman to the company's digital service, Paramount+, for the first time in the U.S.

Paramount separately

extended Stone and Parker's overall production deal for their firm, Park County. As part of that pact, Park County will receive a minimum of \$250 million a year through 2030 to make at least 50 new "South Park" episodes, according to two people familiar with the deal but not authorized to speak publicly. For now, the streaming compensation is counted toward the overall deal.

The gravity-defying deals prove that even as Hollywood studios struggle financially, they are willing to pay big bucks to proven hitmakers.

"In a business where nobody knows anything, there is one certainty: 'South Park' always wins," said former Comedy Central chief Doug Herzog, who brought [See 'South Park,' A11]



ALLEN J. SCHABEN/Los Angeles Times
EVA ALBUJA surveys landslide damage near her Rancho Palos Verdes home.

'Not safe' to build, city says

After two years of landslide movement, officials in Rancho Palos Verdes want ban on new development

PERSPECTIVES

Voices MARK Z. BARABAK COLUMNIST

Newsom is threatening a redistricting end run

In 2010, California voters drove the foxes from the henhouse, seeing to it that lawmakers in Washington and Sacramento would no longer have the power to draw congressional districts to suit themselves.

It wasn't close.

Proposition 20 passed by a lopsided 61%-to-38% margin, giving congressional line-drawing authority to an independent mapmaking commission and thus ending decades of pro forma elections by injecting much-needed competition into California's House races.

Now, Gov. Gavin Newsom is talking about undoing voters' handiwork.

The governor said he may seek to cancel the commission, tear up the boundaries it drew and let Democratic partisans draft a new set of lines ahead of next year's midterm election — all to push back on President Trump and Texas Republicans, who are attempting a raw power grab to enhance the GOP's standing in 2026.

The threatened move is a long shot and, more than anything, a ploy to boost Newsom's White House ambitions.

It's also highly presumptuous on his part, reflecting an increased arrogance among lawmakers around the country who are saying to voters, in effect, "Thank you for your input. Now go away."

Take what just happened in Missouri. Last year, 58% of voters approved a ballot measure increasing the state minimum wage and requiring employers to provide paid sick leave. This month, Republican Gov. Mike Kehoe signed legislation that limited the minimum wage increase and scrapped the sick leave requirement altogether.

In two other states, Alaska and Nebraska, lawmakers similarly tried but failed to, respectively, overturn voter-passed measures on paid sick leave and a hike in the minimum wage.

"It's a damning indictment of representative democracy when elected officials are scared of the will of their own voters," said Alexis Magnan-Callaway of the Fairness Project, a union-backed advocacy group that focuses on state ballot measures.

It is indeed.

But it's part of a pattern in recent years of lawmakers, mainly in Republican-led states, undercutting or working to roll back voter-



ERIC GAY Associated Press

IN TEXAS, Republicans are looking to redraw the state's congressional districts in a raw power grab.

designed measures to enshrine abortion rights, expand Medicare and raise the minimum wage.

To be clear, those measures were passed by voters of all stripes: Democrats, Republicans and independents.

"People are transcending party lines to vote for issues that they know will impact their communities," said Chris Melody Fields Figueredo, executive director of the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, a progressive organization. By ignoring or working to nullify the result, she said, lawmakers are helping contribute "to what we're seeing across the country, where people are losing faith in our institutions and in government."

And why wouldn't they, if politicians pay no mind save to ask for their vote come election time?

In a direct attack on the initiative process, at least nine state legislatures passed or considered laws in their most recent session making it harder — and perhaps even impossible — for citizens to place measures on the ballot and seek a popular vote.

There can be issues with direct democracy, as Sean Morales-Doyle of the Brennan Center for Justice pointed out.

"There can be times when systems can be abused to confuse voters," he said, "or where voters do things without maybe fully understanding what it is they're doing, because of the way ballot measures are drafted or ballot summaries are offered."

But it's one thing to address those glitches, Morales-Doyle said, and "another thing to just basically say that we, as the representatives of voters, disagree with what voters think the best policy is and

so we're going to make it harder for them to enact the policy that they desire."

In Texas, Republicans

are wielding their lopsided power in hopes of erasing as many as five Democratic-leaning congressional seats, boosting the GOP's chances of keeping control of the House in the 2026 midterm election. Trump, staring at the prospect of an emboldened, subpoena-wielding Democratic House majority, is backing the effort whole-hog.

That, Newsom said, is the fighting-fire-with-fire reason to tear up California's congressional map and gerrymander the state for Democrats just as egregiously as Texas Republicans hope to do. "We can sit on the sidelines, talk about the way the world should be. Or, we can recognize the existential nature that is this moment," the governor

asserted.

It's awfully hard to argue against corralling the errant Trump and his Republican enablers. Still, that's no reason to ignore the express will of California voters when it comes to reining in their own lawmakers.

Taking Newsom's gerrymander threat at face value, there are two ways he could possibly override Proposition 20.

He could break the law and win passage of legislation drawing new congressional districts, face an inevitable lawsuit and hope to win a favorable ruling from the California Supreme Court. Or he could call a costly special election and ask voters to reverse themselves and eliminate the state's nonpartisan

redistricting commission, at least for the time being.

It's a hard sell. One presumes Newsom's message to Californians would not be: "Let's spend hundreds of millions of your tax dollars so you can surrender your power and give it back to politicians working their will in the backrooms of Washington and Sacramento."

But that's the gist of what they would be asked to do, which bespeaks no small amount of hubris on Newsom's part.

If elections are going to matter — especially at a time our democracy is teetering so — politicians have to accept the results, whether they like them or not.

Otherwise, what's the point of having elections?

Harvard seeks restoration of federal funding

BY MICHAEL CASEY

BOSTON — Harvard University appeared in federal court in a pivotal case in its battle with the Trump administration, as the storied institution argued the government illegally cut \$2.6 billion in federal funding.

President Trump's administration has battered the nation's oldest and wealthiest university with sanctions for months as it presses a series of demands on the Ivy League school, which it decries as a hotbed of liberalism and antisemitism.

Harvard has resisted, and the lawsuit over the cuts to its research grants represents the primary challenge to the administration in a standoff that is being widely watched across higher education and beyond.

A lawyer for Harvard, Steven Lehotsky, said at Monday's hearing that the case is about the government trying to control the "inner workings" of Harvard. The funding cuts, if not reversed, could lead to the loss of research, damaged careers and the closing of labs, he said.

"It's not about Harvard's conduct," he said. "It's about the government's conduct toward Harvard."

The case is before U.S. District Judge Allison Burroughs, who is presiding over lawsuits brought by Harvard against the administration's efforts to keep it from hosting international students. In that case, she temporarily blocked the administration's efforts.

At Monday's hearing, Harvard asked her to reverse a series of funding freezes. Such a ruling, if it stands, would revive Harvard's sprawling scientific and medical research operation and hundreds of projects that lost federal money.

A lawyer for the government, Michael Velchik, said the Trump administration has authority to cancel the grants after concluding the funding did not align with its priorities, namely Trump's executive order combating antisemitism.

He argued that after the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attacks on Israel, Harvard allowed antisemitism to flourish at the university, including protesters camped out



HEATHER DIEHL Boston Globe

PEOPLE gather Monday in Boston to decry the billions of dollars in funding cuts.

search is antisemitic. At one point, she called the government's assertions "mind-boggling."

She also argued the government had provided "no documentation, no procedure" to "suss out" whether Harvard administrators "have taken enough steps or haven't" to combat antisemitism.

"The consequences of that in terms of constitutional law are staggering," she said. "I don't think you can justify a contract action based on impermissible suppression of speech. Where do I have that wrong?"

Velchik said the case comes down to the government's choosing how best to spend billions of dollars in research funding.

Harvard's lawsuit accuses the Trump administration of waging a retaliation campaign against the university after it rejected a series of demands from a federal antisemitism task force in April. A second lawsuit over the cuts filed by the American Assn. of University Professors and its Harvard faculty chapter has been consolidated with the university's suit.

The task force's demands included sweeping changes related to campus protests, academics and admissions. For example, Harvard was told to audit the viewpoints

Faculty and alumni rally for Harvard

Several dozen alumni from Harvard joined students and faculty to decry the effort to cut the federal funds, holding up signs reading "Hands Off Harvard," "Strong USA Needs Strong Harvard" and "Our Liberty Is Not For Sale."

Anurima Bhargava, who wrote the amicus brief on behalf of more than 12,000 fellow Harvard alumni in the case, said the graduates spoke up because "they understand what is at stake here and what the end goal of the government is, to take away our ability to pursue the mission, the freedom and the values that have been the cornerstone of higher education."

Three Harvard researchers who lost their federal funding spoke about disruptions to the long-term effect of funding on cancer, cardiovascular diseases and other health conditions. They said the cuts could force researchers to go overseas to work.

"Unfortunately, the termination of this research work would mean the end of this progress and the implications are serious for the well-being of Americans and our children into the future," said Walter Willett, a Harvard professor of epidemiology and nutrition.

eligible for new grants, and weeks later the administration began canceling contracts with Harvard.

As Harvard fought the funding freeze in court, individual agencies began sending letters announcing the frozen research grants were being terminated. The cited a clause that allowed grants to be scrapped if they no longer align with government policies.

Harvard, which has the nation's largest endowment at \$53 billion, has moved to self-fund some of its research, but warned it can't absorb the full cost of the federal cuts.

In court filings, the school said the government "fails to explain how the termination of funding for research to treat cancer, support veterans, and improve national security addresses antisemitism."

The Trump administration denies the cuts were made in retaliation and argues the government has wide discretion to cancel contracts for policy reasons.

The research funding is only one front in Harvard's fight with the government. The Trump administration also has sought to prevent the school from hosting foreign students, and Trump has threatened to revoke Harvard's tax-exempt status.

Finally last month, the

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Ban on new homes in landslide zone proposed

[Landslides, from A1]

"This is a natural disaster and it's all associated with water — rainwater — and I don't know what winter is going to look like; I don't know what next year is going to look like," Mihranian said. "We don't know what's in store, so we're taking a prudent and cautious approach."

The proposed ordinance would affect approximately 400 homes and 132 privately owned lots across roughly 2 square miles, including all of the Portuguese Bend neighborhood, and western sections of the Seaview and Portuguese Bend Beach Club neighborhoods. All three areas saw major damage over the last two years.

If the ordinance passes, it would make permanent an emergency moratorium on new construction that city officials enacted in October 2023. It would also strengthen a prior development ban that had been in effect since the late 1970s, but had many exceptions that carved out avenues for several new homes to be built in the last few decades, some of which won approval through lawsuits.

Mihranian said some of those property owners who successfully sued to build homes in the early 2000s ended up suffering the worst fates in the recent landslide movement. Several of the homes were recently "structurally red-tagged," Mihranian said, meaning the city found them unsafe and unlivable. And at least five recently applied for federal buyouts due to severe damage, according to Brandy Forbes, the city's director of community development.

"All along, the city's position has been [that] new construction, bringing in that level of development, was not prudent for an area known to be actively moving," Mihranian said. "The behavior of the landslide fluctuates and it depends on weather and rain. We have



ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

CORINNE GERRARD works on improving her home in the Portuguese Bend area of Rancho Palos Verdes amid damage from landslides.

always said it's not safe. ... The information that's in the record ... speaks for itself."

While an appellate court in 2008 found that the property owners had a right to build on their land and downplayed the landslide threat, Mihranian said the risks are much clearer now. Not only did the movement accelerate dramatically in the last two years — partly due to the activation of a new, deeper slip plane and back-to-back winters with above-average rainfall — sliding also affected areas that historically had never experienced damage.

"Today is very different," Mihranian said. "What we saw in 2024 was a significant change in the behavior of the landslide."

But he's also aware it's an emotional and complicated issue for residents and prop-

erty owners. Many remain hopeful the movement will continue to slow or subside, or they believe there's a way to implement reliable landslide mitigation measures, either of which could allow for normal life, and construction, to resume. It's particularly frustrating for owners of vacant lots with coveted ocean views — properties that would typically sell for top dollar.

At a community meeting July 16, several residents voiced worry that the blanket ban could further depress property values — even for residents just outside the slide zone. Some questioned the fairness of allowing major repairs to existing homes, but banning new construction. A few questioned why the whole region would be lumped to-

gether when many sections have seen movement stop in recent months.

Nikki Noushkam, a resident whose home saw some damage during the height of the movement but has recently seen things stabilize, worried about how the plan makes this ordinance indefinite and would be applied indiscriminately to any area that has seen movement, no matter the latest data on stability.

"To me this just doesn't make sense to basically come and say, 'This is forever and ever,'" she said Wednesday night. "Why are you applying a blanket policy on all of this? It just doesn't make sense to me."

While the proposed ordinance wouldn't include a timeline to reassess it, city officials said it could be amended in the future if cir-

cumstances change drastically.

"We're going to continue to review it as time goes on," Mayor David Bradley said. "We're trying to come up with the best solution. A lot of this is about public safety and trying to make people's houses and their properties safe."

Other neighbors were more supportive of the idea, and appreciated a cautious approach given the extent of the recent damage.

"It's too raw right now to be building on what's been damaged for the last two years," said Eva Albuja, another resident who experienced damage. She worries that without further mitigation and a pause in construction — which some think can exacerbate the landslides by altering the landscape — the extent of

the movement could expand even further.

Gordon Leon said he agrees that new development on the area's unstable ground probably isn't the smartest — or safest — investment, but he's glad repairs and restoration will continue to be allowed. As a longtime resident, he's committed to figuring out a way to stay in the area, even if it means making modifications that "landslide-proof" his home, such as transferring it from a fixed foundation and onto more flexible steel cribbing.

"We've looked around for other areas that we could have the same sort of community and space, [but] it's not in Southern California," Leon said. "This is an incredibly special community where people have lived together a long time."

L.A. Unified testing scores hit record high, erasing pandemic lows

[Education, from A1]

address to administrators and guests at Disney Concert Hall in downtown L.A.

"We didn't just take it back to pre-pandemic levels. We exceeded pre-pandemic levels of performance," he told The Times. "We established a new high water mark."

Morgan Scott Polikoff, a professor at USC's Rossier School of Education, described the gains as "indeed impressive and seem to have, in most cases, more than erased losses attributable to the pandemic.... This is an important development and the district should be proud of it."

Nonetheless, overall results show that achievement — as measured by test scores — in the nation's second-largest school system remains a work in progress.

"Large proportions of students in the district, especially students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, are still performing below state standard," Polikoff said.

In total, 46.5% of students met or exceeded grade level standards in English language arts in tests conducted in April and May. In math, the figure was 36.7%.



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

THE BELL High School marching band performs at L.A. Unified's event Tuesday at Disney Concert Hall.

students still are not achieving grade-level standards in math. The number is better but still low for reading, with 36% of Black students meeting or exceeding the state standards for their grade.

ents in recent decades, which helps explain their children's stronger success in school," he said.

Carvalho told The Times that the most recent scores, which reflect tests taken

ing community should ever have to withstand," he added, "weeks of immigration raids, helicopters overhead, militarized vehicles in our streets, uniformed agents near school gates and gradu-

drove down student performance on the standardized tests.

Carvalho became superintendent in February 2022.

During the more recent crises, students and staff

Carvalho, whose contract expires in February, said that the district used the one-time money effectively and, that although it is gone, the system in place should continue to build on the academic gains.

He listed a number of key initiatives as contributing to gains, such as giving more resources and applying more oversight to schools and groups of students who needed more help. He also cited better data and an ability to use them faster to tailor instruction.

Tutoring — before, during and after school, and in-person and online — was a central strategy. So was increasing classroom instructional time by promoting summer school and offering mini-academies during winter and spring break, he said.

Intervention teachers were deployed to work with small groups of students, and coaches helped refine teaching.

Some of these efforts predated Carvalho's arrival from Miami, where he had been the longtime superintendent.

Challenges ahead

The challenges ahead involve more than improving the quality and pace of learn-

Film

On-location dropped commercial saw jump,

By SAMANTHA

Hollywood faced another quarter, shoot days June decreased compared with period last year, a new report. The shoot days quarter with 5,744, cording organization tracks Greater That to compare average Pro

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OPINION VOICES



Associated Press

A REMOTE CAMERA in Lassen County caught an adult gray wolf and three pups in 2019.

Voices PETER KAREIVA GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

We know how to coexist with predators, but will we?

Examples of bears or wolves affecting humans are extremely rare, but they cloud our priorities

HUMANS HAVE always had an emotional relationship with predators. We both revere and demonize them. We buy more than 100 million teddy bears annually for our children, while 50,000 real bears are hunted yearly in North America. Cultural fables and fairy tales simultaneously vilify and celebrate predators — from “The Lion King” to the Three Bears to the Big Bad Wolf.

In elementary school, we teach kids about the food chain and how every animal is crucial in maintaining a balanced ecosystem. Predators are often the entry point to understanding ecology for young minds, with an abundance of nature films about sharks, bald eagles, tigers and many more fascinating predators. Somewhere between elementary school and adulthood, we forget what predators teach us and how much we need them.

And it is this nation's adults who need to reconcile their ideas about predators and decide if we truly want to live with the ones we once attempted to exterminate. Our capacity to erase predators is proven. Our ability to conserve and recover them is equally established. The fundamental question remains: Do we wish to live alongside them?

This age-old conflict resurfaced in California recently, igniting modern tensions. This spring, the Los Angeles Times wrote several articles on predator tensions, including a suspected black bear attack in Sierra County, conflict between farmers and a handful of wolves, and ranchers pressuring legislators for permission to “remove” wolves. Ranchers spotlighted these sparse examples by with an ominous, documentary-style video online likening the severity of the issue to investigative crime reporting. This reporting

paints a picture of an intensifying war between predators and those who would hunt them, if not for California law.

The reality is that these examples of predators affecting humans are extremely rare. However, these stories build up and fuel a societal bias known in psychology as the availability heuristic, whereby a person uses a mental shortcut to judge the likelihood of an event based on how easily examples come to mind. When our judgment is clouded in this way, we design wildlife policy driven by fear, not

reason.

Images of a calf mauled by a wolf are evocative and ignite emotional responses. The same is true of an image of a wolf caught in a snare trap slowly suffering as it struggles to free itself. The conflict among wolves, prey and people is real. The question is how to manage it responsibly.

First, we need clarity on the actual harm done by predators, including wolves. Wolves do attack livestock, but statistically the risk of an individual cow being attacked by a wolf is less than 1 in 100,000 in

any given year. In more than 125 years across North America, wolves have only ever killed two people. In contrast, Americans kill each other at an annual rate of 6.8 per 100,000 individuals. It is clearly safer to be cattle with wolves roaming about than it is to be a person in society. This is not to say a wolf mauling a calf is not a tragic loss for an individual rancher, but we need to reckon these sparse personal losses with the drastic ecological damage of hunting wolves to near extinction.

Today, there are approximately

6,000 to 8,000 gray wolves remaining in the contiguous U.S. (down from approximately 2 million). Wolves are known as “ecosystem guardians” or “keystone species,” meaning they are critical to maintaining ecosystem balance. When they are systematically removed, we see increases in livestock diseases, land degradation and food chain destabilization.

Given the rarity of wolf attacks, we must invest in solutions that protect both ranchers and predators. An example is Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers' proposal to include \$3.7 million in the state budget for wolf monitoring and abatement projects. These nonlethal methods are the most effective way to ensure predators and humans coexist. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture data, nonlethal methods reduce wolf-livestock conflicts by an average of 91%.

Yet in 2023, USDA's Wildlife Services devoted less than 1% of its \$286-million budget to nonlethal efforts. Despite nearly equal preference among livestock producers for both approaches, the money overwhelmingly supports lethal control.

It is possible to create a future in which wolves, cattle and ranchers coexist with minimal harm. However, it is not possible to imagine a world in which one side “wins” outright without severe negative consequences. We have the resources to find a win for ranchers and a win for wolves — if the American people choose to do so.

PETER KAREIVA, a former chief executive of the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach and a former director of UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, is a founding member of Team Wolf, an organization focused on the long-term protection and recovery of gray wolves.

LETTERS



USC LIBRARIES Corbis via Getty Images

CALIFORNIA GOV. Goodwin Knight, left, and Walt Disney celebrate the opening day of Disneyland on July 17, 1955.

Memories of early Disneyland

Re “Looking back on 70 years of magic,” July 17

IN reading this article, I feel compelled to cast my vote for Disneyland's first decade as the best of times for those of us who were able to enjoy it.

Shortly after I turned 5, my parents took the family to Disneyland just two weeks after its opening in 1955. Even in its early days, it fit the definition of “magic kingdom” to a T. While I was watching a parade, Zorro himself (Guy Williams) stopped his horse right in front of me and scrolled a familiar “Z” in the air with his famous saber. He then dismounted and signed my autograph book after having his merry band of characters do just the same.

The icing on the cake came when Walt Disney himself suddenly appeared, patted me on

My dad began working at Walt Disney Studios in 1956 just after the opening of Disneyland. He would tell us that the Disney motto was “Never stop creating.” All Disney employees were given free tickets to the park annually. While driving from Hollywood to Anaheim took about two hours since the 5 Freeway was just being constructed, my mom would pack a lunch to eat in the car during the long journeys. Very special memories.

CHERYL ORTEGA
Los Feliz

..

Re “Democrats seek to curb donations to presidential libraries,” July 17

Disney may have created “70 years of magic” but, elsewhere in the same edition of the paper, the Los Angeles Times noted that Disney pledged \$15 million for President Trump's library to resolve a defamation lawsuit. That pretty much cancels out Disney magic in my book.

MARY MONTES
West Hills

‘Budget crisis’ over fund delay

Re “States sue U.S. for

ExpandLA, which leads a coalition of more than 500 youth-serving organizations across L.A. County, I see the devastating impact firsthand. Parents face impossible choices between work and child care, causing economic ripple effects devastating local businesses and communities.

The administration must immediately release these funds. Our children's futures are at stake.

LOU CALANCHE
Los Angeles

Both sides must work on reform

Re “Democrats see a flicker of hope on immigration,” July 17

If we are to have meaningful immigration reform, which hasn't happened for nearly 40 years, both sides of the aisle must participate. Republican Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar of Florida has introduced a bill called the Dignity Act of 2025, which provides legal status to undocumented migrants who meet certain requirements, have no serious criminal record, pay restitution and give 1% of their earnings to the U.S. government.

As Washington bureau chief Michael Wilner notes,

place to live, and to create a more hopeful future for our children.

ANASTACIO VIGIL
Santa Monica

Hybrids may be key to progress

Re “California can fix Trump's EV mistake,” Opinion Voices, July 17

Seemingly convinced by the impressive but still ambiguous electric vehicle successes in America and worldwide, guest contributor Mike Murphy lists various solutions for issues that hinder his great expectations for an imminent electric, clean car future in California. But statistics from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, based on data gathered from 2023 through the second quarter of 2024, distinguish between all-electric and hybrid vehicle sales in the U.S., a revealing distinction that may curb enthusiasm like Murphy's.

Of the 18.7% of electric or semi-electric vehicles sold in the U.S. during the tracked time period, 7.1% were battery electric vehicles, but a greater percent, 9.6%, were hybrids (with only 2% plug-in hybrids in the mix). Crucially significant, however, is that battery electric vehicle

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“The Late Show Colbert.”

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GLOBAL OUTCRY OVER HUNGER IN GAZA

U.S. blames Hamas
as truce talks collapse.
France says it will
recognize Palestine.

By MICHELLE L. PRICE
AND JOSEPH KRAUSS

WASHINGTON — As the United Nations and global aid groups sound the alarm of widening starvation resulting from U.S.-backed Israeli food distribution policies in the Gaza Strip, the Trump administration said Thursday it is cutting short Gaza ceasefire talks and bringing its negotiating team home from Qatar to discuss next steps.

The apparent derailing of the talks comes as Israel's blockade and military offensive have driven Gaza to the brink of famine, according to aid groups. The U.N. food agency says nearly 100,000 women and children are suffering from severe, acute malnutrition, and the Gaza Health Ministry has reported a rise in hunger-related deaths.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he would hold an emergency call Friday with officials from Germany and France to discuss how to urgently get food to people in need and pursue a plan to build a lasting peace.

"The suffering and starvation unfolding in Gaza is unspeakable and indefensible," he said in a statement. The three European countries "all agree on the pressing need for Israel to change course and allow the aid that is desperately needed to enter Gaza without delay."

[See Gaza, A4]



PALESTINIANS gather to receive meals in Gaza, where a rise in hunger-related deaths has been reported.

KHAMES ALREFI Anadolu

Pros, cons of Edison's fire offer

Plan could pay victims quicker but less, and aid state wildfire fund

By MELODY PETERSEN

Southern California Edison's plans to compensate Eaton fire victims for damage were met with skepticism Thursday from lawyers representing Altadena residents, but drew tentative support from others who say the initiative could help shore up the state's \$21-billion wildfire fund.

The utility announced its Wildfire Recovery Compensation Program this week, saying it would be used to quickly pay victims, including those who were insured, while avoiding lengthy litigation.

The announcement comes as state officials consider ways to shore up the state's fund to compensate wildfire victims, amid fears that it could be fully exhausted by Eaton fire claims. Fees that attorneys receive as part of victim settlements could further strain the fund.

State Sen. Henry Stern (D-Calabasas) said Edison's new program

may have some merit as potentially "a more efficient way" than lawsuits to make sure victims are fairly compensated.

He pointed out that lawyers were "coming across the country to represent" Eaton fire victims. "Are they really getting their money's worth when they pay 30% to these lawyers?" Stern asked.

Mark Toney, executive director of the Utility Reform Network, said Edison's program had the potential to reduce costs that otherwise must be covered by the wildfire fund, which was established in part by a surcharge on the bills paid by customers of Edison, Pacific Gas & Electric and San Diego Gas & Electric.

"If Edison is determined to be the cause of the fire, anything they can settle early reduces the costs that otherwise would be paid later," Toney said.

The utility has released few details of how the program would work, leaving victims who are already cop-

ing with uncertainty with more questions. And lawyers who had been seeking to represent victims in lawsuits against Edison were quick to urge caution.

"Without admitting fault or providing transparency, Edison is asking victims to potentially waive their rights," said Kiley Grombacher, one of dozens of lawyers involved in litigation against Edison for the Jan. 7 wildfire that killed 19 and destroyed 9,000 homes in Altadena.

According to Edison, the program would be open to those who lost homes or businesses as well as renters who lost property. It would also cover those who were harmed by smoke, suffered physical injuries or had family members who died.

"People can file a claim even if they are involved in active litigation," said Kathleen Dunleavy, an Edison spokeswoman.

Dunleavy said the company would be releasing more information [See Edison, A8]

Divisive merger gets FCC approval

Skydance expected to
take over Paramount
soon in \$8-billion deal
after months of strife.

By MEG JAMES

David Ellison stepped within reach of his hard-fought prize, Paramount Global, after winning regulators' blessing for his Skydance Media's \$8-billion takeover of the storied media company.

The Federal Communications Commission, led by Trump-appointed Chairman Brendan Carr, approved the Skydance-Paramount merger Thursday after months of turmoil and a monumental collision between press freedoms and the president's broad powers.

Carr's consent came just three weeks after Paramount agreed to pay Trump \$16 million to settle the president's lawsuit over edits to a "60 Minutes" broadcast. Trump had claimed CBS producers doctored the October interview with then-Vice President Kamala Harris to boost her election chances. CBS denied his allegations, saying the edits were routine.

1st Amendment experts called Trump's suit "frivolous." But, after months of internal upheaval, Paramount capitulated. The move was widely seen as a prerequisite for Skydance to win FCC approval and push the Paramount-Skydance merger over the finish line.

Trump has said on social media that, as part of the [See Paramount, A12]

Immigrants struggle to manage heat

Fear of federal raids has families and workers
facing sweltering conditions, inside and out

By Marcos Magaña

For the last 16 years, Isabel has worked harvesting carrots, lemons and grapes in the Coachella Valley.

The undocumented mother of three — who, like others The Times spoke with, declined to give her last name out of fear for her family's safety — says the heat in recent summers has been increasingly difficult to manage.

And now, with fewer workers showing up due to fears of ongoing immigration enforcement raids across California, Isabel says she and those who remain have to endure fewer breaks and more physical strain.

Crews that once numbered five groups of 18 workers each are down to three groups of 18. The demands, however, haven't changed.

"You have to pack so many boxes in a day," Isabel said in Spanish. "If it takes you a while to get water, you'll neglect the boxes



State's Democrats eye district remap to counter Texas

By SEEMA MEHTA

California Democrats led by Gov. Gavin Newsom may upend the state's mandate for independently drawn political districts as part of a brewing, national political brawl over the balance of power in Congress and the fate of the aggressive, right-wing agenda of President Trump and the GOP.

The effort being considered by state Democratic leaders is specifically intended to reduce the number of Republicans in California's congressional delegation, retaliation for the ongoing actions by GOP leaders in Texas to upset

Republican redistricting expert Matt Rexroad. "Once we get to the point where we're just doing random redistricting after every election ... redistricting won't be used as a tool to reflect voter interests. It will be used to just bludgeon minority political interests, whether it be Republican or Democrat, after every election."

Newsom already has been in talks with Democratic legislative leaders and others about reconfiguring California's congressional district boundaries before the 2026 election.

Doing so probably would require a statewide ballot measure to scrap or tempo-

FireAid grants help residents rebuild

[FireAid, from E1] behind this, and our top priority was trying to do what people needed, and do what's best for fire survivors," said Lisa Cleri Reale, a member of FireAid's grant advisory committee.

Yet the grant recipients are still grappling with the deep, intertwined needs of a scarred Los Angeles. That work will require investment for years to come.

"The high cost of rent, and food prices being 25% higher, it all puts pressure on people already struggling to meet basic needs," Flood said. "Even though we're six months from the fires, there's still such a significant need."

In between sets, FireAid highlighted individual stories of incalculable tragedy. One family, the Williams of Altadena, recalled onstage that "At 3:30 in the morning, the warning hit our phones. We grabbed what we could — our grandmother's special clock, our father's ashes, our 47-year-old parrot Hank. Among the five of us standing here, we lost four homes and we're struggling to find places to live."

For music fans calling in donations during Stevie Nicks' and Sting's sets though, it was fair to ask how those specific groups were chosen, and how they were making a difference to families like the Williams. In late May, the Palisades Community Council sent a letter to the Annenberg Foundation and FireAid organizers. The critical letter asked for a full accounting of the grants, and clarity on the decision-making process behind them.

The FireAid organization responded with the full timeline and the grant amounts they'd dispersed, along with plans for future rounds and applications for small groups to apply.

"This is very different from other philanthropy. We have a different magnifying glass looking at us," Reale said. "There are people who bought tickets to these concerts, who donated on the website, the musicians who gave their time, these people

want to know that their contributions are doing what's best. We have fire survivors as our top priority, but we're also asking — can we look at the FireAid donors and explain our decisions in a tangible way?"

In breaking down the group's grant-making process, FireAid representatives showed how its earliest priorities were organizations providing direct cash, food and shelter to survivors.

In February, \$1 million went to the L.A. Regional Food Bank, followed by a second grant of \$250,000. The money went to pay extra drivers, forklift operators and warehouse workers to help process and distribute donations after the fires. "We're a year-round program, so when disaster strikes, that gets laid on top of it," Flood said.

With its February grant, the group Inclusive Action distributed \$500 cash grants to landscapers, street vendors and other outdoor workers who lost jobs or homes in the fires. The Change Reaction, a direct-aid group, got \$2 million from the first round of FireAid grants.

Change Reaction's president, Wade Trimmer, said that the funds provided 2,500 recipients with grants up to \$15,000 for immediate rent and transportation needs.

"The strategy was to stabilize as many households as we could because when you have stability, you make better decisions," Trimmer said. "Even for wealthy people in the Palisades, it was still a full-time job and an absolute nightmare dealing with it all. But in Altadena, there was an older population with multigenerational households, so for every house that burned, that affected two or three households."

That money helped sustain Elizabeth Jackson, the owner of White Lotus, a workout studio in the Palisades that employed 14 fitness instructors. Jackson lost both her home and business in the fires. "We lost every single client at the studio



JOSH EDELSON AFP via Getty Images

THE PASADENA Jewish Temple & Center burns during the Eaton fire on Jan. 7. Some of FireAid's early grants went to groups like Legal Aid, Bet Tzedek Legal and Public Counsel to help with insurance claims.

because our clients lost their homes," Jackson said. "They're all starting their lives over."

Through a White Lotus regular, Jackson got in touch with Change Reaction, which used some of its FireAid funds to give \$1,000 to each White Lotus staffer and replace fire-damaged equipment so Jackson could reopen in a smaller space nearby. She hopes to return to her old property once it is rebuilt. "That support was a bright light in all the ugliness that happened," she said. "It's awful to lose the studio, but being on the receiving side of that beauty, it's even more powerful than the negative. It keeps me going."

The physical devastation in the burn zones was incomprehensible. For the immediate work of debris removal, flood prevention and vegetation clearing, Team Rubicon got a \$250,000 grant. "FireAid demonstrated a clear understanding of the unpredictable nature of wildfire response, and they



CHRIS PIZZELLO Invision/Associated Press

BILLIE EILISH, left, performs with Billie Joe Armstrong of Green Day during the Forum's FireAid concert. The event helped raise \$100 million for fire relief.

recognized the importance of flexibility and agility during both the immediate relief and long-term recovery phases," the group's spokesperson Thomas Brown said. "They invested in our work at a critical moment."

Wounded and displaced pets received free veterinary care through groups like the Pasadena Humane Society and Community Animal Medicine Project. Yet many people tasked with helping others were also suffering. Many local nonprofit workers lost homes and needed aid to stay afloat while serving others.

"A lot of our staff were in crisis too, where they lost homes or were the only house left on their street in Altadena," said Stacey Roth of Hillside, a Pasadena foster care and youth mental health facility near the Eaton fire zone. One of Hillside's main residential buildings suffered significant smoke damage, and the FireAid grant allowed the facility to move its vulnerable population to hotels nearby.

Michael Sidman of Jewish Family Service lost his own home in the Eaton fire in Altadena. "I'm very lucky to have a strong support system, but it's been a nightmare navigating this," he said. "When you think about people navigating this alone with no family, and unsure how to connect with services, I don't know what they'd do."

His organization used its \$250,000 grant from FireAid largely for comprehensive disaster case management work, particularly for survivors to manage the FEMA bureaucracy. Other early grants went to groups like Legal Aid, Bet Tzedek Legal and Public Counsel to help

knew that people needed to figure out their finances. Some of the fire victims our grantees were working with were on precarious ground financially even before the fires. Our job was to get them into a strong position so when they were ready to rebuild their lives, they wouldn't be floundering."

The fires significantly disrupted school and child-care for young families, many of whom are now homeless or miles away from family and resources.

Victor Dominguez, president and chief executive of YMCA of Metropolitan Los Angeles, said its FireAid grant provided emergency childcare for 1,000 displaced children, along with mental health resources and camp activities for children to reconnect with their fire-scarred neighborhoods.

"Young kids experienced so many traumatic things in their local communities," Dominguez said. "After the fires, kids and families had an opportunity to go somewhere safe where they trust. Now we are seeing the shock, the reality of this being a long-term experience. We were able to hire more licensed social workers, and the money we received from FireAid helped support that."

Mental health services remained a complex and ongoing need, especially for youth and children. "I went to the Sears building a couple of months ago, where Pali High is temporarily housed, to look at this big wall where kids had posted notes about how they felt post-fires," Reale said. "You could see that the trauma is still alive and well. Nobody's healing overnight."

Much of the aid dispersed was less visible to the public,

is wrap ourselves around tools or ways that a lot of people can benefit from when they're ready to rebuild, and that could be the sustainable models. We can't rebuild the same way. So we'll put our money toward things that are helping people with home hardening models, and things to prevent and mitigate future fires."

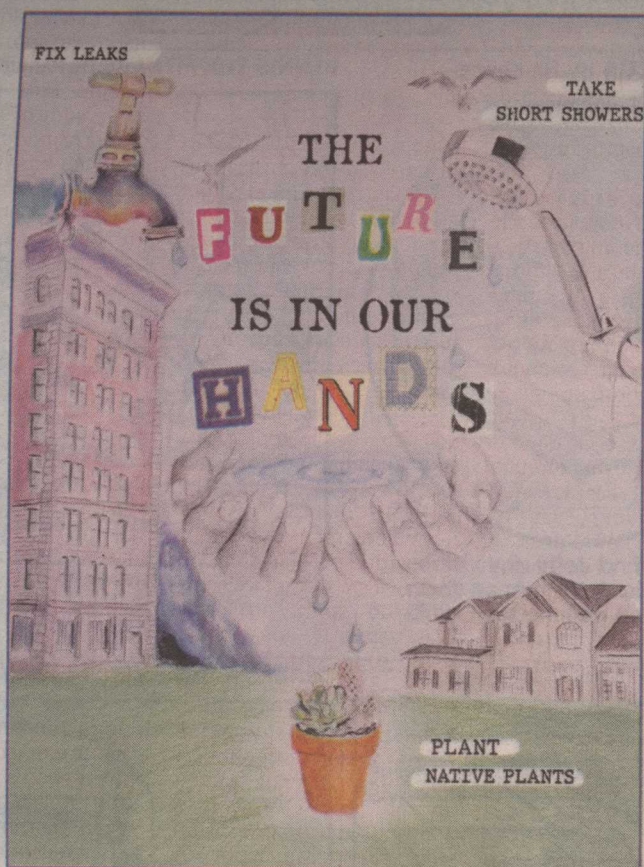
For the more intangible cultural communities lost — like the music studios, rehearsal rooms and artists' homes burned in both fires — recovery will be diffuse. The January concert made FireAid a natural fit as a partner for MusiCares, the Recording Academy's affiliated charity. That organization declined to say how much FireAid gave specifically, but said that the grant contributed to \$6.25 million in fire recovery aid given to 3,200 affected music professionals to help rebuild studios, pay medical bills and evacuate burn sites.

Post-fire gentrification and financial speculation are new major fears. The Palisades has always been a coveted neighborhood, where working-class residents will face challenges returning to any affordable apartments lost. Altadena — home to a long-standing Black community and many blue-collar, intergenerational households — could see longtime residents forced out of their beloved neighborhood yet again, this time by economic forces.

A spokesperson for the Black LA Relief and Recovery Fund said it will use its FireAid grant to "build power among residents so they can return, reclaim and rebuild amidst political and financial threats like land grabs and

Los Angeles Times
IN EDUCATION

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LADWP Poster Contest Grand Prize Winner:
Afsana Khatun 12th grade, Van Nuys High School



KARA Marsh of Altadena gets emotional as she looks for items in the ruins of her home after the Eaton fire.

ALLEN J. SCHABEN Los Angeles Times

Bidding *adiós* to Castro, Guevara

Removing Mexico City monument renews a political battle

BY PATRICK J. McDONNELL

MEXICO CITY — Good-bye, Fidel.

Hasta la vista, Che.

Denunciations and accolades greeted the abrupt removal this month of a controversial monument in the Mexican capital commemorating the two revolutionaries, Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara.

The monument, a pair of bronze, life-size sculptures of Castro and Guevara chilling on a bench, recalls a consequential moment in both Mexican and Cuban history: the pair’s first meeting, which took place in an apartment in Mexico City in June or July 1955, according to historians.

At the time, both were twentysomething militants in the formative stages of their transformation into

leftist icons who would inspire a global generation of revolutionaries and activists.

A leftist Mexico City government installed the monument in 2017 in a small park in the Colonia Tabacalera neighborhood, not far from where the storied duo first met in a Cold War encounter that has taken on near-mythical dimensions among many on the left.

In the two sculptures,

both men stare straight ahead and are decked out in light combat garb — Guevara in his trademark beret (a look immortalized on T-shirts across the globe) and Castro sporting a fighter’s cap. His legs crossed, Castro grasps a cigar in his left hand, and a book in his right. Guevara’s right hand secures a pipe.

The sculpture has long sparked polemics: Although [See Mexico City, A4]

Claims by Jan. 7 fire victims may go to mediation

More than 1,000 policyholders filed state complaints about issues with insurers.

BY LAURENCE DARMIENTO

After receiving more than 1,000 complaints from Jan. 7 fire victims about how insurers are handling their claims, state regulators are considering referring hundreds of the cases to mediation — a little used practice that some consumer advocates fear could hurt policyholders.

The Department of Insurance has been bombarded with complaints from property owners since the Palisades and Eaton fires destroyed more than 16,000 structures and damaged more than 2,000 others, causing up to \$45 billion in insured damages by one estimate.

Fire victims say they have experienced slow responses from insurance company claims handlers, been ro-

tated to multiple adjusters, denied hygienic testing for toxic chemicals and given lowball offers.

The department has encouraged fire victims unhappy with how their claims are being managed to file complaints. They are then assigned a compliance officer who attempts to resolve the issues with their insurer.

Joy Chen, chief executive and co-founder of the Eaton Fire Survivors Network, which, according to its website, has some 5,000 members, said that the compliance officers have not been successful in sorting out the disputes.

“Across thousands of complaints I’ve seen discussed, I have barely heard of a single survivor who said DOI actually helped them resolve their claim,” she said. “At best, people say things like, ‘I finally got a return call from my adjuster — right before they left for vacation again.’”

The department says the complaint process has helped policyholders whose homes were destroyed or [See Mediation, A8]

Trump team ramps up online trolling

Amid immigration raids, social media posts aim to provoke.

BY HAILEY BRANSON-POTTS

Morgan Weistling, an accomplished painter of cowboys and Old West frontier life, was vacationing with his family this month when he got a surprising message from a friend about one of his works of art.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, he said the friend told him, had posted a work he had painted five years ago to its official social media channels without his knowledge.

The painting, which looks like a scene from the Oregon Trail, depicts a young white couple — she in a long dress, he in a cowboy hat — cradling a baby in a covered wagon, with mountains and another wagon in

the background.

“Remember your Homeland’s Heritage,” the Department of Homeland Security captioned the July 14 post on X, Instagram and Facebook.

Exactly whose homeland and whose heritage? And what was the intended message of the federal department, whose masked and heavily armed agents have arrested thousands of brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking immigrants — most with no criminal convictions — in California this summer?

That has been the source of heated online debate at a time when the Trump administration has ramped up its online trolling with memes and jokes about the raids that critics have called racist, childish and unbefitting official government social media accounts.

The “Remember your Homeland’s Heritage” post racked up 19 million views on [See Memes, A6]

Federal cuts and raids threaten programs for migrant students

At LAUSD, fewer of them participate this summer

By Howard Blume



LAUSD migrant education program students share axolotl artwork at L.A. Zoo.

GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

The 8-year-old girl is a migrant student whose family moves frequently in search of seasonal work. But for five weeks this summer, she found stability, fun and academic nurturing in a program for children like her that included visits to the L.A. Zoo twice a week.

But like the axolotl, the salamander she studied, this program is critically endangered. Because migrant students may have family members who are living in the country illegally — or may themselves lack legal status — the Trump administration wants to end federal funding for it, saying the program wastes money and violates his policy directives.

And in a more immediate blow to the program, amid fears over immigration-enforcement raids, fewer children went to the zoo and virtually no parents attended concurrent education workshops on how to support their children’s learning.

Although the federally funded zoo experience is a tiny program in the Los Angeles Unified School District — and a small part of a summer school that reaches tens of thousands of students, it offers a window into how Trump administration poli-

[See School, A7]

Court volunteers aid detainees before ICE

BY MARTHA BELLISLE, CEDAR ATTANASIO AND COLLEEN SLEVIN

SEATTLE — After a Seattle immigration judge dismissed the deportation case

court hearings. Meanwhile, these volunteers are taking action.

A diverse group — faith leaders, college students, grandmothers, retired lawyers and professors — has been showing up at immi-

How cloud seeding sparked Texas flood theory

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Los Angeles Times

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LAW ENFORCEMENT investigate the scene where a vehicle rammed into a crowd waiting outside a club. DAMIAN DOVARGANES Associated Press

Driver crashes into crowd outside club, injuring 30

Suspect is dragged from his car and beaten before being shot

BY RICHARD WINTON,
LAURENCE DARMIENTO,
REBECCA ELLIS
AND MALIA MENDEZ

A patron who had been tossed out of a popular East Hollywood nightclub early Saturday later intentionally smashed his car into a crowd outside the venue, injuring 30 people — seven critically

— before being pulled out of his vehicle and shot by a bystander, police said.

The gray Nissan Versa drove onto the sidewalk and hit a valet stand and a taco stand before slamming into a light standard, creating a scene of total chaos among clubgoers who had congregated outside the Vermont Hollywood club.

Video taken just mo-

ments after the crash and posted on Instagram showed multiple people dressed for a night out lying bloodied, dazed and moaning on the ground.

"He just smacked everybody, bro," a voice cries out, inquiring of women lying on the ground: "Ladies, can you feel your legs?"

LAPD Capt. Ben Fernandes said the suspect was

kicked out of the nightclub at 1020 Vermont Ave. for being disruptive before he crashed into the crowd.

"From review of the video he went up to the sidewalk further down and when he hit bystanders, it was an intentional act," Fernandes said. "He was pulled from the car, handcuffed by security and then beaten by by-

[See Crash, A11]

Sheriff's detectives were 'the best'

Three killed in East L.A. blast served 74 years, collectively, in law enforcement.

BY CLARA HARTER
AND RICHARD WINTON

The three Los Angeles County sheriff's detectives killed in an explosion Friday were described as the "best of the best," who served their community with honor, courage and unwavering commitment.

The fallen lawmen —



A FLAG is raised before a procession leaves Biscailuz Center Training Academy after the Friday explosion. CARLIN STIEHL Los Angeles Times

identified as Dets. William Osborn, Victor Lemus and Joshua Kelley-Eklund — combined to serve the Sheriff's Department for 74 years. They leave behind grieving colleagues, friends and family, including 16 children among them.

The lethal blast took place while the men were moving ordnance at the Sheriff Department's Biscailuz Center Training Academy in East L.A. It marked the agency's deadliest incident in more than 160 years and sent shock waves through the law enforcement community.

[See Detectives, A8]

Plan to add border agents faces challenges

History suggests Trump's push could result in problematic hires

BY ANDREA CASTILLO

WASHINGTON — President Trump says he wants to hire 10,000 new U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and 3,000 new Border Patrol agents, but experts and the history of law enforcement hiring sprees suggest the process could be challenging, lengthy and possibly result in problematic hires.

The massive funding bill signed into law this month by Trump earmarks about \$170 billion for border and immigration enforcement, including tens of billions for new deportation agents and other personnel. Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin, in a statement to The Times, said that the agency will deliver on the president's hiring directive.

"In June, our 2025 Career Expo successfully recruited 3,000 candidates and generated 1,000 tentative job offers — nearly double the 564 from 2023," she wrote. "Our recruitment strategy includes targeted outreach, thorough vetting and partnerships with state and local law enforcement."

During his first term, when Trump called for ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to hire 15,000 people collectively, a July 2017 report by the Homeland Security inspector general found significant setbacks.

"Although DHS has established plans and initiated actions to begin an aggressive hiring surge, in recent years the Department and its components have encountered notable difficulties related to long hire times, proper allocation of

[See Agents, A11]

California versus Trump: Who wins?

President is taking his policy fights to the Golden State — and it's punching back.

BY KEVIN RECTOR

Six months into President Trump's second term, his predilection for picking on California has never been on fuller display, turning the state broadly and Los Angeles specifically into key battlegrounds for his right-wing agenda.

There are chaotic immigration raids occurring across the state and military troops on L.A. streets. The administration has sued the state or city over sanctuary policies, transgender athletes and the price of eggs. The state has sued the administration more than 30 times, including over funding cuts, voting

restrictions and the undoing of birthright citizenship.

Federal officials are investigating L.A. County's gun permitting policies and have sought to overturn a host of education, health and environmental regulations. They have talked not only of enforcing federal laws for the benefit of California residents, but of showing up in full force — soldiers and all — to wrench control from the state's elected leaders.

"We are not going away," Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said at a news conference in Los Angeles last month. "We are staying here to liberate this city from the socialists and the burdensome leadership that this governor and that this mayor have placed on this country, and what they have tried to insert into this city."

The antagonism toward [See Battle, A10]

Federal cutbacks create crisis for county's health system, poorest

BY REBECCA ELLIS
AND NIAHM ORDNER

Los Angeles County's health system, which is responsible for the

dential administration and Republican-led Congress looking to drastically slash the size of government.

President Trump's "Big Beautiful Bill," which passed

ices, which oversees four public hospitals and roughly two dozen clinics. In an all-staff email Friday, the agency called the bill a "big



PICKLES

by BRIAN CRANE



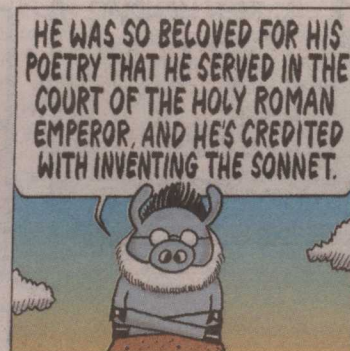
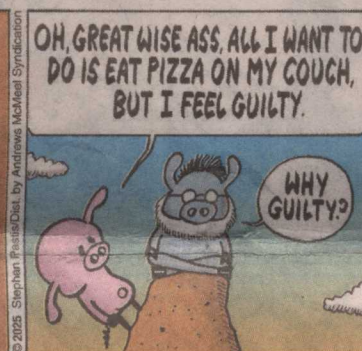
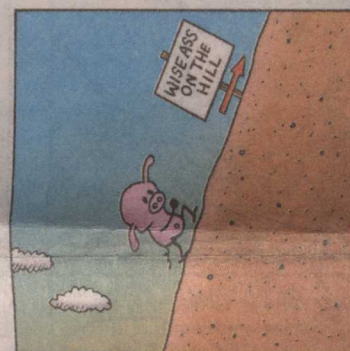
DOONESBURY By Garry Trudeau



CRABGRASS By Tauhid Bondia



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE By Stephan Pastis



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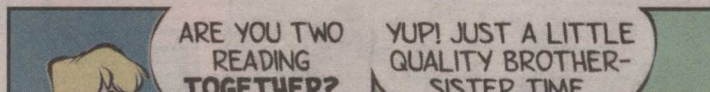
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Bass lauds plan to withdraw Marines from L.A.

[Marines, from A1]
ing order and upholding the rule of law. We're deeply grateful for their service, and for the strength and professionalism they brought to this mission."

A Defense Department official publicly estimated last month that the National Guard and Marine deployment in Los Angeles would cost about \$134 million.

News of the Marines' withdrawal, which was first reported by the New York Times, broke minutes after Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass finished a Monday morning public appearance with veterans' groups, where she decried the "inappropriate" presence of military forces on L.A. streets.

"This is another win for Los Angeles. As we said this morning — the way to best support our troops is to have them do what they enlisted to do, not to protect two office buildings," Bass said in response to the withdrawal.

The raids have sown panic in immigrant communities across the Los Angeles region and become a flashpoint of division for the Trump administration.

Transit ridership in Los Angeles has plummeted, formerly bustling neighborhood spots are routinely empty and many undocumented Angelenos are skipping standard healthcare visits.

The pervasive chilling effect in a so-called sanctuary city may be part of the Trump administration's goal. But recent polling suggests the immigration raids are increasingly unpopular with the public.

According to data released last week by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the majority of people arrested do not have criminal convictions. Nearly half of those caught up in the sweeps are Mexican nationals, and many have deep ties to the U.S.

The administration has also battled escalating legal



LUKE JOHNSON Los Angeles Times

MARINES GUARD a federal detention center in Los Angeles. The sometimes-volatile protests have largely wound down this month.

challenges targeting the raids.

In mid-July, a federal judge issued a scorching rebuke, temporarily blocking federal agents from using racial profiling to carry out indiscriminate arrests.

Last week, the administration asked a federal appeals court to stay the judge's order, which would allow immigration agents to resume unfettered raids. The appeals court will take

up the stay Monday and could rule on it by the end of the month.

Ysabel Jurado, a progressive member of the Los Angeles City Council whose district includes the downtown area, cheered the administration's decision to withdraw the Marines from Los Angeles.

"The #SummerofResistance is working. Our federal occupation may be coming to an end here in LA

but the fight against authoritarianism is far from over," Jurado said on X, before positing that the Marines "weren't here to quell civil unrest, they were called to incite it."

Gov. Gavin Newsom has also contended that the president purposefully "inflamed a combustible situation."

"There was never a need for the military to deploy against civilians in Los An-

geles," Newsom said in a statement Monday. "The damage is done, however. We, again, call upon them to do the right thing and end the militarization once and for all."

Newsom and California Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta previously sued over Trump's mobilization of National Guard forces to Los Angeles, but the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals found that the president had broad

authority to deploy the military in American cities.

Next month, a federal judge in San Francisco is expected to decide whether federalized troops violated federal law while deployed.

Roughly 2,000 National Guard troops remain in the region, according to U.S. Northern Command.

Times staff writers Sonja Sharp and Brittny Mejia contributed to this report.

'I was shocked at what was happening to me'

[Diaz, from A6]
son, a slight 5-foot-5, would be deported to Mexico, where he wouldn't be able to read signs. Life was already hard there; what would it be like for Diaz, she wondered. He doesn't know Mexican Sign Language.

"I'm never going to see him again," Maria thought.

The family called Muro's office that day and spoke with an assistant. The immigration firm was booked out with appointments two months in advance. But when the raids began, Muro instructed her staff to screen those detained to see if they could help or refer them out.

That evening, she learned of Diaz's case. She called the family.

After learning Miguel had had no luck finding his brother downtown, Muro drove to an ICE office in San Bernardino. An officer in the parking lot gave her the phone number and email address for a supervisor at the B-18 detention center where Diaz was being held.

She called. It was around 7:30 p.m. No one answered. So she sent an email.

"Help DEAF MUTE CLIENT DETAINED WITH DACA," the subject line read. She attached Diaz's current work permit, which had been issued by U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services.

"Since he had DACA



CHRISTINA HOUSE Los Angeles Times

"FINALLY, I'm free," Diaz thought before departing Texas. But he still wears a monitor on his left ankle.

family was crying too.

He spent most of the time sleeping, tossing and turning on the hard bunk bed. Sometimes he joined other detainees watching TV. There were no subtitles.

"Day would come and it was the same thing," he recalled. "Morning, afternoon, evening, I was isolated."

Muro tried to find a way to connect with Diaz as he was detained in Texas. The supervisor told her the facility did not have text telephone devices, used by people with hearing or speech disabilities to send and receive text messages.

Muro saw her client for the first time on Webex at his

fore, where I have a bond request on an admin closed case," the judge said. "This is the first time."

The government lawyer explained that Diaz had been picked up during "an at-large operation by ERO and HSI," both arms of ICE. The judge questioned whether he even had juris-

mother cried. He felt like crying too.

His brother told him he would soon be released. Diaz asked if his brother had retrieved his car. Miguel assured him he had.

Someone had even scrawled a plea to traffic enforcement officers on the burgundy 2005 Toyota

his wallet. The Real ID was no longer inside.

Expenses kept stacking up. They rented a hotel. Because they couldn't fly without Diaz's ID, Miguel scrambled to rent a car.

Miguel noticed a change in his brother, who often smiled and laughed, but now seemed reserved. Diaz would ask permission to eat. To use the restroom. To shower.

"I knew he had a fear," Miguel said. "I think he felt he had to be a certain type of way."

Diaz's cousin and brother took turns driving the more than 11 hours back to L.A. Diaz anxiously checked the ankle monitor.

They passed through New Mexico. Then Arizona. Diaz, who had never before left the state of California, marveled at the \$2 gas.

But he also realized that people noticed the ankle monitor. His heart raced.

"They didn't call the police or anything, but I know they were looking at me," he said.

He did not start to calm down until they reached California.

As night fell, Diaz's father, Miguel Sr., clutched his phone outside the apartment, watching his son's location draw nearer with each minute.

"Vienen en San Pedro," Miguel Sr. announced. They were on a nearby street. And he still called his son to make sure they were almost home. "Ya mero llegas verdad?" "Ya estoy en la esquina."

Boat is searched in blast inquiry

A deadly grenade
explosion in East L.A.
leads to investigation
in Marina del Rey.

BY RICHARD WINTON,
HANNAH FRY AND
CHRISTOPHER BUCHANAN

The investigation into a deadly explosion that killed three Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department bomb squad technicians at a training facility continued to expand Monday, with authorities executing a search warrant on a boat docked at Marina del Rey.

Witnesses said more than a dozen police cars swarmed the 13900 block of Marquesas Way on Monday morning with officers interviewing boat owners and evacuating people from the dock.

It was not immediately clear by the afternoon whether authorities had found anything on the boat, but investigators said the search was a result of them following leads on the possible origin of grenades found inside a Santa Monica apartment complex storage area last week and transported to East L.A., where the explosion occurred Friday morning.

The blast was the single deadliest incident for the department in more than 150 years, killing department veterans Dets. Joshua Kelley-Eklund, Victor Lemus and William Osborn.

"While the pain of this loss will always be felt, we hope our efforts provide the answers a tragedy like this demands," said Kenneth R. Cooper, special agent in charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

[See Inquiry, A8]



JAVIER DIAZ SANTANA, 32, left, is welcomed home in South L.A. after returning from Texas.

Deaf, mute, terrified — and shipped to Texas by ICE

Javier Diaz Santana, a DACA recipient, was arrested in an immigration raid at his car wash job in Temple City

BY BRITNEY MEJIA

He was on his way to wash a car when he glanced up and saw co-workers sprinting off. A woman frantically motioned for him to flee. His heart raced as he tried to find the source of their alarm.

Confused and frightened, Javier Diaz Santana jumped over the wall behind the car wash in the San Gabriel Valley. Years earlier, a vehicle had run over Diaz's foot while he worked there, and it was a struggle for him to run. He made it about a block. His foot throbbed with pain.

He saw two white SUVs on the street and realized what was unfold-

ing. His workplace was being raided by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, like so many other businesses and neighborhoods in Los Angeles over the past week.

Breathless, Diaz stopped. One of the vehicles pulled over, blocking his way. Masked, armed men exited, yelling. He tried to understand. He couldn't see a badge. One had a vest with the letters "HSI" — Homeland Security Investigations, an arm within ICE.

One seemed to be demanding something. Diaz gestured at his ears.

He could not hear. And he couldn't speak.

Diaz, 32, is deaf and mute. He thought that presenting his Real ID driver's license would keep him safe. He has legal permission to be here. He came to the U.S. from Mexico when he was about 5 years old and had been granted permission to work more than a decade ago under the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. He has no criminal history.

He took his wallet from his pocket. An agent grabbed it and wouldn't give it back.

Diaz took out his phone so he could type a message about his disability. They took that too. Then they cuffed his hands and shoved him [See Diaz, A6]

3 Marines' toughest mission: Freeing their dad

BY NATHAN SOLIS

Narciso Barranco, an undocumented landscaper in Orange County, instilled a sense of pride for his adopted country in his three American-born sons.

All three boys joined the Marines, which they saw as a sound start for a better life in the United States.

Then, in June, Barranco was grabbed by masked federal immigration agents while working on the job.

His arrest went viral on social media, with some outraged at images of the agents beating Barranco. For the last month, his family waded through the federal immigration system

under the Trump administration. Narciso, 48, was born in Morelos, Mexico, and arrived in the United States more than 30 years ago, where he married a U.S. citizen and raised three sons.

Within hours of his arrest, his eldest son was talking to reporters and pushing for his release. The sons' service in the U.S. military kept a media focus on his case, and thanks to a variety of interviews his eldest son provided, the case remained in the news cycle.

Narciso Barranco was finally released on bond after spending 24 days in custody, but he still faced an uncertain future.

Narciso's best advocate as his case moves forward is

his 25-year-old son Alejandro Barranco, a Marine veteran who served as an engineer equipment mechanic and was deployed to Afghanistan during the U.S. withdrawal from the country.

The junior Barranco has tried his best to rescue his father's livelihood since the arrest. He took up his father's work as a landscaper and put his own work on hold. He's waited outside federal detention facilities — first in Los Angeles and then in Adelanto — just to see his father or to attend immigration court hearings.

"It has for sure been an irritating process, to see how poorly they treat the people [See Sons, A8]



ALEJANDRO BARRANCO outside Metropolitan Detention Center, where his father was held.

MARINES LEAVING AFTER WEEKS IN L.A.

The Pentagon orders
the 700 troops to
withdraw, claiming
credit for 'stability.'

BY JULIA WICK

More than a month after President Trump made the fiercely contentious decision to send about 700 U.S. Marines to Los Angeles, those troops will begin withdrawing from the city, Pentagon officials said Monday.

The decision comes a week after the Pentagon announced that half of the almost 4,000 National Guard troops deployed to the Los Angeles area would be released from duty.

The Marines and National Guard were sent to the city in early June amid widespread federal immigration raids and fiery protests against the enforcement actions, with the Trump administration vowing to crack down on "rioters, looters and thugs."

Although the president contended that he had "saved Los Angeles," local and state officials denounced the extraordinary deployment of troops to the streets of an American city.

Advocates and California politicians also argued that the heavy-handed spectacle would be incendiary, potentially putting both the troops and protesters at risk.

The sometimes volatile protests that erupted in downtown Los Angeles and other parts of the region in mid-June have long since wound down.

Some troops are tasked with guarding federal buildings, and some have accompanied immigration agents on tense enforcement actions. In recent days, they have been largely fighting tedium, without much to do.

Speaking on behalf of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, chief Pentagon spokesperson Sean Parnell credited the troops with helping to bring calm to the area.

"With stability returning to Los Angeles, the Secretary has directed the redeployment of the 700 Marines whose presence sent a clear message: lawlessness will not be tolerated," Parnell said in a statement Monday.

"Their rapid response, unwavering discipline, and unmistakable presence were instrumental in restoring order."

[See Marines, A7]

The wild fight to control S.F. Zoo

Malcolm-Jamal Warner dies

The "Cosby Show" actor drowned during a family vacation in Santa Rosa. He was 54.

Trump chisels away at Congress' power